













THE LADY OF THE LIMBERLOST

BOOKS BY  
GENE STRATTON-PORTER

*Nature*

THE SONG OF THE CARDINAL  
HOMING WITH THE BIRDS  
BIRDS OF THE BIBLE  
MUSIC OF THE WILD  
FRIENDS IN FEATHERS  
MOTHS OF THE LIMBERLOST  
MORNING FACE  
TALES YOU WON'T BELIEVE

*Novels*

FRECKLES  
AT THE FOOT OF THE RAINBOW  
A GIRL OF THE LIMBERLOST  
THE HARVESTER  
LADDIE  
MICHAEL O'HALLORAN  
A DAUGHTER OF THE LAND  
HER FATHER'S DAUGHTER  
THE WHITE FLAG  
THE KEEPER OF THE BEES  
THE MAGIC GARDEN

*Poetry*

JESUS OF THE EMERALD  
THE FIRE BIRD

*Essays*

LET US HIGHLY RESOLVE







“GRACE GREENWOOD”  
*“The Little Lady of Happy Memories”*

THE  
LADY OF THE  
LIMBERLOST

THE LIFE AND LETTERS  
OF GENE STRATTON-PORTER

BY  
JEANNETTE PORTER MEEHAN



1928

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## *Introduction*

### THE LITTLE LADY OF HAPPY MEMORIES

THE Little Lady of Happy Memories is watching me from across the room. She occupies the seat of honour in my study, and every time I catch her eye, I smile at her, and she seems to smile back at me. Her wise, inscrutable blue eyes look out from a serene, untroubled face; although she has lived long, life's little joys and sorrows have passed over her lightly and have left but few scars. Her glossy black hair is parted in the middle and waves demurely over her ears; her smooth hands with the small, tapering fingers are folded sedately in her lap; pale blue garters peep from underneath her dress; and on her feet are black shoes with tiny bows. Her dress is old and faded; it has fallen in holes in many places, but such trifles do not trouble her: she is a dignified, old-fashioned Lady—a real thoroughbred—more concerned with the vital things of life around her than with her clothes.

You must have guessed—the Little Lady of Happy Memories is my mother's first and only doll, only fourteen inches tall, but such a loved, cherished doll. The black hair, blue eyes, rosy cheeks, and red lips are painted on a glossy china head; from the elbows her arms are china, delicately moulded; the blue garters are painted on china legs; the shoes are painted on china feet; and around the ankles there still remain the narrow strips of cloth, just as my mother sewed them on with childish

stitches, so that the feet could not click together and break.

Many years ago Mother named her Grace Greenwood, but I call her the Little Lady of Happy Memories because she has seen so much of life. She has watched many children grow up and has helped to keep them happy; she has watched life's many and varied experiences come to the parents of these same children, first in my grandmother's family, then in Mother's family—and now she sits in my study—still watching. Few tragedies have come into her life: it has been mostly love and happiness that she has watched. She must appreciate the tender care she has had—even now there is not a scratch or crack to mar her placid beauty. For she *is* a beautiful doll, and she *is* a Lady—she is not a little girl doll, nor a baby doll—she seems never to have had any childhood. That is why she looks so wise. She knows many things: she knows more about my mother than any one else, for Mother has carried her about the country for many years. Wherever Mother was, there also was Grace Greenwood. She has known Mother's happiness, love, joys, sorrows, successes, failures, ambitions, and achievements; she knew her innermost thoughts and every mood, for I have often heard my mother talking to her.

So I am glad the Little Lady is watching me while I am writing this little volume in memory of Mother. I am trying to write it truthfully and faithfully. I believe the Little Lady of Happy Memories will not allow me to go wrong—she will watch me, and if I make a mistake, some way she will tell me and I will correct it.

It is the tale of a simple, unselfish life, simply told;



it is not one of wealth, luxurious living, and arrogance. It is only the story of what one woman, with the heritage of a clean mind, honest heart, ambitious soul, and intelligent brain, was able to accomplish by her own efforts, many times against serious odds, and always with the thought behind it all of how she could best help others, not allow the struggling ones to become discouraged, and cheer and comfort them over the rough places. She, too, had experienced the rough spots, so she knew how to sympathise and offer advice.

I will try to tell you enough of her parents, training, early life, natural instincts, environment, and ambitions to enable you to understand why the foundation on which she builded was so sure and sound, and why she stood so firmly on it, withstanding attacks and criticisms of various sorts. There was nothing of sham or pretense in the structure she builded; it was all wholesome, fine, and honest. I want you to know the elements in her character that made her kind, true, industrious, generous, and ambitious. And there was also pride—not the foolish pride of a vain, selfish woman, but the pride that did not allow her to fail or falter in any undertaking once she began it; a pride that admitted no lowering of standards or deviation from the principles of honour, truth, and justice.

Her work was not a constant raillery against existing conditions: she believed in the inherent and fundamental good of the people, and she never thought either the country or the people were “going to the dogs.” Rather, her work was a valiant plea and argument for the things that should be, in the hope that these principles, attractively presented, might prove more alluring than unending preachments, which only weary one.

She had a peculiar genius in a timely choice of subjects. She insisted she knew what people would like, if given a choice, and she clung to her point unfalteringly through much serious opposition by various publishers. But she fought it out and won. She *did* know, and she proved that she did: she knew, as no one else has ever seemed to know, the minds and hearts of her public and the things that would appeal to them. Having chosen her ideals, she had a marvellous way of applying them constructively, whether in life, romance, fiction, nature study, or poetry.

She was a happy little wild thing as a child; a busy, contented wife; a wonderful mother; and she must have been a successful writer, for her books still live and breathe health, happiness, and cleanliness into the lives of those she has left behind. The keynote of it all is simplicity, in code, manner, and dress—so simple we fail to grasp it: just love, love of God, love of Nature, love of her fellow men. I know the bigness of her soul, her generous motives, and her untiring efforts to reach the goal she set for herself. I shall never cease to grieve that she did not live to see the glorious realisation of her plans and dreams. The few of us who are left to “carry on” will strive to maintain her ideals, trusting that her own life and work will keep her memory alive in the hearts of her friends.

It is not such a long story, this tale of a happy little girl who grew up to be a sweetheart, wife, mother, author, and artist; and we hope, the Little Lady of Happy Memories and I, that our story will not weary you; we hope it may prove a ray of light and hope for all ambitious souls who are struggling for a place in the sun.

JEANNETTE PORTER MEEHAN.

“Floraves,” Bel-Air, Los Angeles  
June 1, 1927

# THE LADY OF THE LIMBERLOST





*From a pen-and-ink drawing by F. Sands Brunner*

"HOPEWELL HOUSE," BIRTHPLACE OF GENE STRATTON-PORTER

## *Chapter I*

### MARK AND MARY STRATTON

WHAT more wonderful heritage could be possible for a child than to be born on a farm?—just to have the privilege of watching all sorts of animal, bird, and plant life around you grow and develop during the procession of the year? What untold secrets a child learns, and what an everlasting effect they will have on later life if they are cherished with a sympathetic and understanding heart. Just to watch a tiny bud on an apple tree unfold into a delicate, fragrant pink blossom and then grow into luscious fruit; to watch a pair of birds build a nest—the mother sits while the father sings to her, the eggs hatch, and the baby birds grow up and fly away; to watch a caterpillar spin a cocoon, hatch a glorious moth or butterfly, and sail away over the flowers; to watch a seed



grow into a plant and bloom; to plant a vegetable garden and watch it grow into food; to see the glory of a waving wheatfield with the fireflies drifting over it at sunset, or the freshness of the dew on a clover field in early morning with a lark flinging down notes from the clouds to his mate who is sitting on their nest hidden away among the clover blossoms; to feed the tiny chickens, ducks, and turkeys; to play with young pigs, colts, calves, and lambs; to gather the eggs; to slide down the straw stacks; to jump into the huge bins of grain; to ride the plough horses and watch fat old robins and sleek, iridescent blackbirds pick worms from the furrows; to watch the butchering, milking, and churning, the curing of meat, the cider making; and then to come in, tired and hungry, to a table loaded with steaming, carefully prepared food, with big pitchers of creamy milk; and after that to creep into a downy feather bed to unbroken sleep.

Such was the home of little Geneva Stratton—a rolling Indiana farm of two hundred and forty acres with a bubbling little creek crossing it. Mark and Mary Stratton built a big, comfortable house, painted it white, and ran a white picket fence across the front. There were many large trees for the birds, a flower garden for bees and butterflies, a vegetable garden, an orchard, and a barn with a big yard for the animals and houses for chickens, ducks, and turkeys, for seeds, tools, and machinery. Their bush and vine-covered fences crept in rows of gaudy colour. Their orchard was planted in the valley with a square of apple trees in the centre, widely bordered by peach, and at bloomtime it spread like a great pink-bordered white blanket on the face of earth. Swale they might have drained made moist places for sheets of blue flags, buttercups, and cowslips. You could

look from no window in the house without seeing a picture of perfect beauty. It was an ideal home, clean, neat, artistically planned, and the whole permeated with an atmosphere of love, contentment, and kindliness.

At the time of their marriage, December 24, 1835, Mark Stratton described his bride, Mary Schallenberger, as a "ninety-pound bit of delicate porcelain, pink as a wild rose, plump as a partridge, having a big rope of bright brown hair, never ill a day in her life, and bearing the loveliest name ever given to a woman—Mary." He further added that God fashioned her heart to be gracious, her body to be the mother of children, and, as her especial gift of grace, He put flower magic into her fingers.

Years later Geneva wrote of her:

"She was the mother of twelve lusty babies, all of whom she reared past eight years of age, losing two little girls at that time as a result of scarlet fever and whooping cough, too ugly a combination for even such a wonderful mother as she. With this brood on her hands, she found time to keep an immaculate house, to set a table renowned in her part of the state, to entertain with unfailing hospitality all who came to her door, to beautify her home with such means as she could command, to embroider and fashion clothing for her children by hand; but her great gift was conceded by all to be her ability for making things grow. At this she was wonderful. She started dainty little vines and climbing plants from tiny seeds she found in rice and coffee. Rooted things she soaked in water, rolled in fine sand, planted according to habit, and I cannot remember one instance in which they failed to justify her expectations. She even

started trees and shrubs from cuttings no one else would have thought of trying to cultivate. Her last resort was to cut a slip diagonally, insert the lower end in a small potato, plant as if rooted, and it almost always grew. There is a shaft of white stone standing at her head in a cemetery that belonged to her, on a corner of my father's land; but to me her real monument is a cedar of Lebanon, which she set in this manner, topping the brow of a little hill crossing the grounds. She carried the slips from Ohio, where she had them of a man who had brought a tree, a tiny thing, from the Holy Land, and he gave her two little cuttings. She planted both this way, one in her dooryard and one in her cemetery. That tree must stand thirty feet tall now and have a body two feet in circumference.

"My mother was of Dutch extraction, and, like all Dutch women, she worked her especial magic with bulbs, which she favoured above any other flowers. Tulips, daffodils, star flowers, Easter flowers, lilies, dahlias, little bright hyacinths that she called 'blue bells,' she dearly loved. From these latter she distilled exquisite perfume by putting clusters at acme of bloom perfection in bowls lined with freshly made unsalted butter, covering them closely and cutting the few drops of extract thus obtained with alcohol. She could do more different things, and finish them in a greater degree of perfection, than any woman I ever have known. If I were limited to one adjective in describing her, 'capable' would be the word."

In those days the cooking, baking, and sewing which was required by a large family caused not the slightest confusion. Large families were the rule, and where each child was given his portion of work a system re-



MARY AND MARK STRATTON  
*The parents of Gene Stratton-Porter*





sulted by which everything was accomplished smoothly and easily.

Mother wrote of her father:

"Father was descended from a long line of ancestors of British blood. He was named for, and traced his origin to, that Mark Stratton who married the famous beauty, Ann Hancock, and settled on Stratton Island, afterward corrupted to Staten, according to family tradition. From that point back for generations across sea he followed his line to that family of Strattons of which the Earl of Northbrooke is the present head. To his British traditions and the customs of his family my father clung with rigid tenacity, never swerving a particle through environment or association. He believed in God, in courtesy, in honour, in cleanliness, in beauty, in education. I have heard him say that he would rather see a child of his the author of a book of which he could be proud than on the throne of England—which was the strongest way he knew to express himself. His very first earnings he spent for a book; when other men rested, he read; all his life he was a student, with the most tenacious memory of any man I ever knew intimately. He especially loved history—Rolland's, Wilson's *Outlines*, Hume, Macaulay, Gibbon, Prescott, Bancroft. He could quote all of them, paragraphs at a time, giving dates with unfailing accuracy. He could repeat the entire Bible, giving chapters and verses, save the books of generations; these he said were a waste of grey matter to learn. I never knew him to fail in telling where any verse quoted to him was to be found. I was almost afraid to make these statements, although there are many living who can corroborate them, until John Muir

published his story of his boyhood days, and in it I found the history of such rearing as was my father's told of as a common thing among children of Muir's time, and I have referred many inquiries as to whether this feat were possible to the Muir book.

"My father's mind was such a treasure house that the greatest pity of his passing was that all he knew should perish with him. But it is scarcely fair to express it that way, for all his life, with no thought of fatigue or inconvenience to himself, he travelled miles uncounted to share what he had learned with those less fortunately situated, by delivering sermons, lectures, talks on civic improvement, and politics. To him the love of God could be expressed so genuinely in no other way as in love of his fellow men, and the one Biblical quotation most often on his lips was: 'All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.' He could put more meaning into those lines in accent and action than I was accustomed to from other men, but possibly that was because I knew him better than I ever have known any other man. He worshipped beauty: beautiful faces, souls, hearts; beautiful landscapes, trees, animals, flowers. He loved colour—rich, bright colour and every variation, down to the palest shades. He was especially fond of red, and I carefully keep a cardinal silk handkerchief he was carrying when stricken with apoplexy at the age of seventy-eight. It was so like him to carry about that scrap of red colour.

"My father never was too busy to fertilise a flower bed, or dig holes to set a tree or bush. A word constantly on his lips was 'tidy.' It applied equally to a woman, a house, a field, or a barn lot. He had a streak of genius in his make-up: the genius of large appreciation. Over

inspired Biblical passages, over great books, over sunlit landscapes, over a white violet abloom in deep shade, over a heroic deed of man, I have seen his brow light up, his eyes shine, and his countenance glow until he must have resembled Elijah when he looked into heaven. He was constantly reading aloud to us children and to visitors descriptions of the great deeds of men. Two 'hair raisers' I especially recall were the story of John Maynard, who piloted a burning boat to safety while he slowly roasted at the wheel, and the story of Clemanthe. My heart stops and my flesh creeps as I write these lines that bring back every inflection of my father's wonderful voice as he would cry, in imitation of the captain, 'John Maynard!'—and then give the reply until it sank to a mere gasp—'Ay, ay, sir!'

"His other especial favourite was the story of Clemanthe and her lover's immortal answer to her question, 'Shall we meet again?' I am convinced my father could equal a great actor in reciting that, for he believed in and loved that answer, and his heart thrilled to its depths when he repeated it.

"Strong meat this for babes, but it was the kind we had from the cradle to the day of leaving our home."

Mark Stratton was an ordained minister of the Gospel, and, aside from his duties on the farm, he conducted three services on Sunday at the little church that stood on a corner of his farm. Reverend R. D. Spellman of Fort Wayne, Indiana, wrote to Mother concerning her father as follows:

"In the second year of my ministry, when, at a quarterly meeting, I was urged, in fact almost ordered, by

the presiding elder to preach, and to preach in his place, I tried to excuse myself. Your father came up and said to me: 'Excuses never saved a soul.' Of course, I preached, and tried my best to outdo even the presiding elder, and since that time I have made fewer excuses—I am now in my eighty-eighth year.

"I enjoyed your story of the spelling bee because it carried me back over the years and brought to my mind the Stratton home, with the good mother and the girls full of cheer. I knew your father as an exception to the usual local preacher, especially in preparation for the pulpit. I knew him as a Methodist and as a child of the King. Your own writing reminds me of your father's sermons. He would never preach until he knew his subject, and knew it well; and then he gave it to us with grace and with thoughts so well matured that it was food for all who heard."

Mark Stratton donated the land for this church and helped the neighbours to build it. Next to it is a cemetery where he and Mary and several members of their family are buried. His interest in his fellow men and his desire to serve them is further shown in the fact that he also donated a lot near the church for a country school. The church, the cemetery, and the school bore the name which he gave to his farm, "Hopewell," and as the years have passed the entire countryside has come to be known as Hopewell Community, a fitting memorial to the lives of Mark and Mary Stratton.

## *Chapter II*

### THE DEATH OF LADDIE

MOTHER believed that the ability to write successfully was an especial gift from the gods, and that writing that lives because it is loved can be done only by those having vivid imagination, wide experience, a vital sense of humour, copious expression, and a sharp eye for the daily exhibits of human nature, good, bad, and worse. She believed writers were born with the desire to write so great that it urged insistently until it forced expression. Her ability to write she attributed partly to inheritance.

The Stratton family Bible records: "Geneva Grace Stratton was born August 17, 1863." At this date the Civil War was at its height. Intelligent people were discussing the President's Proclamation of Emancipation and the slave question in general. Mark and Mary Stratton were devoutly anti-slavery and absolute Unionists. They often harboured runaway slaves on their farm. There was a ravine running along the edge of the orchard ending in a hollow, which Father Stratton dug out and made into a cave, or tunnel. The opening of the cave was heaped with stones, and the place was used as an underground station. During the night escaped slaves were brought to the farm and hidden in this cave, where they were given beds of straw, food, and a candle for light, and kept there until the next night, when they were again picked up and taken on their way.



The excitement of these thrilling and perilous times might easily have had both a pre-natal and a post-natal influence on the vivid imagination which Geneva developed later in her writings. Mary Stratton was forty-six and Mark Stratton was fifty when Geneva was born, six years after they had ceased to expect that more children would come to them. Her journey to earth was half over before they knew she was on the way, giving her no excuse to be other than perfectly normal. Both parents being at the height of their intellectual development, the mark of their best was set on the little girl, in her fibre, blood, and brain.

The little Strattons were all very well trained, and, although Geneva was the youngest by six years and the pet of the family, she still had her tasks and small duties about the farm. The older brothers and sisters were married and gone before she was born, and she had nieces and nephews older than she. Although they kept what was then known as a "hired girl," each child had its duties. Geneva's earliest tasks were picking up the clothes pins that dropped on the grass, carrying chips to the wood box in the kitchen and to the huge fireplace in the living room, and pounding bricks into dust to scour the knives. Later she ran errands, swept walks, and helped to feed the chickens and gather the eggs.

Just at the time when her intensive training in household duties was about to begin, her mother's health broke, and the little girl was rather left to amuse herself. This was not difficult, for she loved the outdoors. She ran wild all day, and no questions were asked so long as she appeared on time for meals. She followed the older boys at their ploughing, and often fell asleep curled up in the fence corners of the fields where they

worked. The first money she ever earned came from the sale of Indian arrowpoints which she found while roaming over freshly ploughed fields, and from the sale of goose quills which she picked up in the barnyard. She made dolls out of ears of corn and used catalpa leaves for blankets for them. One corner of the garden was her especial property, and there she stuck onion sets and planted seeds when the boys made garden. Later she planted wild flowers, beginning with violets and spring beauties, and so following down the seasons. She kept butterflies on the screen in the cellar window, carrying them saucers of sweetened water and nectar-laden flowers each morning.

I have heard her tell many times how she spent the entire spring of one year locating sixty-four bird nests. These she visited each day, and by the time the young were hatched the old birds were so accustomed to her that they allowed her to feed the little ones. So she carried hard-boiled egg, boiled potato, and grain in one apron pocket for the seed eaters, and bits of meat and worms in the other pocket for the meat eaters. Her favourite playmate was Bobby, a bantam rooster. She taught Bobby how to crow when he was told, so that when she held church services out in the orchard under the apple trees, Bobby always crowed when it was time for some pious sister to say, "Amen!" Another pet was a fine fat blue jay named Hezekiah. She made a coat, pants, and sunbonnet for him, and taught him to roll cherries across the floor before he dared to eat them. Thus, when she started out to play, Hezekiah sat on one shoulder and Bobby trailed along behind.

One other plaything was a fat china doll which she carried in her apron pocket, as he was only three inches

long. His name was Dick Oglesby, and when she waded or fished in the creek, she never tired of standing him up in the water and watching him grow short and fat or laying him down and watching him grow very long and slim. The crayfish nibbled at his toes and the minnows came up to get acquainted.

It was ever her custom to deal gently and lovingly with wild things, either animals or flowers; doctoring sick or wounded birds or animals, making pets of baby squirrels and rabbits, and gathering only a few wild flowers at a time, mostly carrying them to her invalid mother, who enjoyed their freshness and delicate fragrance. She never gathered great armloads of fragile wild flowers and threw them away as soon as they withered.

Her father, having especially keen perception, noted her extraordinary interest in all outdoor life, so he aided and encouraged her. He taught her that birds are a gift of God, their beautiful music-making and presence a delight, their particular use being to protect crops and fruit from insect pests. He tied a handkerchief over her mouth and walked softly when he lifted her to look into the humming-bird nest, no bigger around than a dollar and bound to a small twig of the snowball bush with spider webs, and there she saw two tiny eggs like lovely iridescent pearls.

One of her favourite spots was a forked branch in a huge catalpa tree which stood by the front gate. Here she could sit quietly watching the sky and the bird life around her, and the travellers up and down the road, so that she might rush into the house and warn the family when company was imminent. It was from this vantage point that she saw the riderless horse of one of the

neighbouring farmers dash by, and it was she who first gave the alarm that started a searching party to find its master lying in a deep ditch beside the highway with his neck broken.

After the mother's health failed, the task of disciplining the family fell upon the father's shoulders. The children were never allowed to use any slang, and they were severely reprimanded for the incorrect use of any word or for using contractions. Mark Stratton had a way of setting his heel firmly on the floor and with the toe of his heavy leather boot tapping the floor when he wanted silence or attention.

One rainy afternoon when her mother had a quilt on the racks and was quilting, little Geneva and her brother Lemon were playing "bear" under the frames. Every few minutes their heads would bump up into the quilt, causing the mother to stick her fingers. She spoke to them once; but they went on with their play. The second time their father, who had been reading, laid aside his paper and glasses and said sternly: "Children, I have heard your mother speak to you *twice*. You may come with me!" Whereupon he escorted them to the barn and switched them soundly.

Once, when very small, Geneva dropped a tin cup with a terrible clatter. Tap, tap, tap, came her father's boot toe. She ruefully picked up the cup and called out: "I dess broke a *tin*."

The evening meal was the most formal and the one where the children were taught their table manners. The smallest child always sat between his father and mother, with the boys on one side of the table and the girls on the other. The coffee pot, with the cups and saucers, was set at the mother's right, and a huge pitcher of milk

at the other end of the table was poured by the oldest child. A blessing was always asked before the meal proceeded. After supper the entire family gathered around the huge fireplace in the living room, where the father went over the lessons of the older children, conducted a spelling school, read to them from some volume of history, and finished the evening with a chapter from the Bible and a prayer. This service the family and the help in the house as well were required to attend.

It fell to the lot of Irvin, an older brother, to teach Geneva her A, B, C's, as all children had to be taught in those days, while he was shut in the house convalescing from the kick of a horse. Lying on the lounge, he had to keep an arm around the squirming little girl in order to prevent her from running away. One day, annoyed by her evident boredom and inattention, he drew her toward him suddenly and firmly. Whereupon, she leaped from his grasp and flared at him: "You Mister Irvin Stratton! You know you are not allowed to give me such raps in the stomach!"

But with all the discipline and training, the usual little naughtiness crept in. Once, when they were seated at the dinner table, some rather unpleasant discussion came up, and Geneva made a very rude and impertinent remark to her father. He said to her: "Geneva, if I could reach you I would box your ears!"

She leaned toward him with a very mischievous look on her face and replied: "Why, Father! You wouldn't either! You *could* reach me if you wanted to!"

Evidently she gauged him correctly, for everybody laughed, and the tempest in the teapot all blew away.

Through all her days on the farm only two of her brothers were at home, Lemon and Leander. Lemon



was next older than she, the tease of the family, and some of his pranks nearly ended disastrously. Once he bent over a limber sapling, showed her how he could swing on it, and told her to try it. But she was lighter weight, and she flew completely over the top of it and across the fence into the pig pen. If it had not happened that she landed in a particularly soft, muddy "wallow," she would have been seriously hurt.

On another occasion Lemon decided to "hang" her; so he tied her sunbonnet on backward, put a noose around her neck, stood her on a barrel, and tied the rope to an apple limb. Then he told her he would push the barrel from under her, and when she had had enough she should tell him and he would put back the barrel. He pushed the barrel from under her; but the noose strangled her and she could not speak. The more she kicked and struggled, the more successful Lemon thought the "hanging" and the harder he laughed. Their father happened to see the performance from the barnyard, rushed to the rescue, and thrashed Lemon; but Little Sister had a sore neck for several days.

The children played "Indian" on the farm horses, riding through the fields and the orchard. Little Sister always was the papoose, Lemon the Indian chief, and the next older sister the princess. They sneaked food from the kitchen and cellar to eat in their playhouse; and one of their chief delights was to take long poles and poke into the water the big black snakes that came up to sun themselves on the logs across the creek.

The older brother, Leander, lovingly called "Laddie" by his little sister, was different—he was older; he had decided to stay on the farm, live on land, and make his life on the soil. He was the idol of his baby sister's

heart, the hero of her dreams, and the gallant knight of all her imagined stories. Laddie was always kind; he was always thoughtful; he was never too occupied to notice her, to answer her questions; never too busy to pick a splinter from her feet or hands; never too tired to carry her on his shoulder and tell her a story.

One Saturday afternoon he was drowned in the Wabash River while swimming with several friends. When they brought his body home, his devoted little sister came rushing into the house, screaming for her mother, one of the beloved Laddie's boots in each hand. She was inconsolable, and it took the entire family to quiet her. This was a crowning grief and heartbreak to the whole family. Laddie's death broke his mother's health and left an ache forever in the heart of his little sister. That the countryside loved him and mourned his untimely passing is shown in the following obituary which appeared in the *Wabash Plain Dealer*, Wabash, Indiana, July 18, 1872:

### OBITUARY

LEANDER ELLIOTT STRATTON

We trust it will be no intrusion to again write a few thoughts of the shocking and sad announcement of two young men drowned in the Wabash River, at Lagro, Saturday evening, the 6th inst. The words shocking and sad express the feeling of an appreciative and sympathising public. But words fail to express the sudden and overwhelming grief that fell upon the hearts of a trusting and confiding father, a doting mother, and loving and affectionate brothers and sisters, which this terrible and appalling intelligence bore to them.

We had no personal acquaintance with one of these young men, Wallace Curnutt, but we will not forbear mentioning the kind, noble, and generous impulses of heart which prompted him to take his life and lose it as he did for another. We extend to his

friends the sympathy of our hearts made doubly tender and sensitive by the terrible event of his death.

Leander Elliott Stratton was born July 30th, 1853, and was, therefore, aged 18 years, 11 months and 6 days. His father, Hon. Mark Stratton, has lived near and been identified with the interests of Wabash County for thirty-four years. He lives a God-fearing life. Each morning in earnest pathos he commends *all* his family to God, and invokes His blessing. . . . Disappointments, afflictions and bereavements have often visited him, but until this bereavement he had begun to feel that the object of his earnest solicitude was being fully developed in this young man. Leander assumed the responsibilities and took the lead in the labour and toil of the farm. He was the stay upon which his parents now felt they could confidently lean in their declining years. No other young man in all that neighbourhood was more full of promise. He had a laudable ambition and was energetic, persevering, industrious, intelligent, sober, honest, truthful, and faithful in the performance of every duty.

In the tenderness of his years he evinced a love of learning and study, and was proficient and thorough in all his studies. His attainments excelled many of far better opportunities. Pure and chaste in all his thoughts, and upright in all his acts, he was rarely excelled in those ripe qualities of mind and heart which lay the foundation of a noble and good man. It is due to his memory that we make such encomiums. We are not unaccustomed to making them, because his many kind acts have often invited and merited like commendations and praises. He was unassuming and no one knew him so well as his friends.

On the evening of that eventful Saturday, he was returning from Wabash with his sister and stopped in Lagro for a few moments on an errand. While there he was invited by some young men of his acquaintance to go to the usual place to bathe. He requested his sister to excuse him fifteen or twenty minutes, saying that he would like to go and thought it would do him good. He turned away from her and went to the river, little thinking that with the sun then almost setting he would very soon sink to rise no more.

He could scarcely swim, and was unaccustomed to this new element. Some of the company made a banter to swim across the

river. He expressed a fear that he could not get across, but the banter was continued with the promise that if he could not reach the opposite shore alone, others would help him. They started, and when a little more than halfway the terrible announcement rang out from the shore that Leander was drowning. Curnutt tried to help him, but Stratton caught hold of him, and he, too, strangled, and they both, helpless and unaided, went down together. The news spread throughout the town, and in a short time expert swimmers came, and after about one half to three quarters of an hour's faithful search their bodies, now lifeless corpses, were recovered.

Leander had not publicly made a profession of religion, but for several months he had exhibited evidence that he was not unconcerned, careless, or thoughtless on this subject. He was a faithful and constant attendant at church services, and many times could not control or conceal his emotions. When entreated to do his duty, he expressed no doubt of his hope and faith in Christ, but said in substance that there was not now such an opportunity to unite with the Church as he desired.

We feel that in his death Society has lost a useful member, and the country a useful citizen. His motto, often used mirthfully but obediently followed, was: "The way to be happy is to be good." We commend the life of this pure young man to the young persons who survive him, as an example worthy of their emulation and imitation.

A. T.

I have in my possession now a one-dollar bill bearing the date of 1863, the year of Mother's birth, which Leander gave to her on her sixth birthday. On the narrow margin across the bottom is written: "The way to be happy is to be good," and it is signed, "Leander Elliott Stratton to Geneva Grace Stratton."

### Chapter III

#### CHILDHOOD LITERARY LOVES

ABOUT the books which she had as a child Mother writes:

"I had very few books, only two or three of my own. The markets did not afford the miracles common to the children of to-day. In fact, books are now so numerous, so cheap, so bewildering in colour and make-up, that I sometimes think children lose their perspective and love none of them as I loved my few plain little ones, filled with short stories and poems, with almost no illustration. I had a storehouse in the school books of my older brothers and sisters, especially in the series of McGuffey readers from One to Six. For pictures I was driven to the Bible, dictionary, magazines about sheep and cattle, and the historical works read by my father.

"As I grew older there were magazines and more books. The one volume in which my heart was wrapped was a collection of masterpieces of fiction belonging to an older sister. It contained *Paul and Virginia*, *Undine*, *Picciola*, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and *Pilgrim's Progress*. These I spelled out painstakingly, a word at a time, until I almost knew them by heart from reading and rereading. They were exquisitely expressed and conceived stories, and they may have done much in forming high conceptions in my childish mind of what really constituted literature and in furthering the lofty ideals instilled by my parents.



"I had been drilled at home and I could understand any ordinary printed matter and spell quite well before I ever started to school. My first literary effort was printed in wabby letters in the back of an old grammar. It was entitled 'Ode to the Moon'; not that I had any idea what an 'ode' was other than that I had heard it discussed in the family, together with epic and sonnet, as forms of poetic expression.

"Oh, Moon, thou art glorious,  
Over the darkness of night  
Thy beams shine victorious.  
Thou lightest the weary traveller's way,  
Guiding his feet till break of day."

Her sister Ada writes:

"As a little girl from four to eight years she was fond of committing a poem or story to memory and then demonstrating it as she recited. One of the most laughable that I recall was 'Peter and Sally Go to Town.'

" 'Come, Dobbin,' said Peter,  
    'I think we will trot.'  
Said the donkey to Peter,  
    'I think we will *not*,'  
As in language and conduct  
    He stuck to the spot.

"To illustrate this Geneva bridled the sawbuck for Dobbin, made a dummy for Peter, and she was Sally riding behind. Then began the dialogue as to how they would induce Dobbin to change his mind. First they chirped and whistled and jerked the halter. Then they used the whip; but not a move from Dobbin. Then Sally proposed she should stick Dobbin with a pin. That was tried, and he kicked until he lost his cargo over his head. Then Sally, the resourceful woman, produced an-

other pin and exhorted Peter to 'prick before' while she 'pricked behind.' Whereupon Dobbin bucked until Sally slid off. Now Peter said:

" 'Suppose we twist his tail,  
This is a remedy  
Never yet known to fail.' "

"Accordingly, they changed places, Peter sitting behind facing backward in order to manage the tail. Then Dobbin lay down and proceeded to roll, and they had to abandon the trip to town.

"All the while the ridiculous descriptive rhyme was going on, Geneva was interpreting with new variations, so that we never could be sure just what the show might develop. I have seen Father and Mother and the family laugh until the tears rolled, the little girl apparently unconscious of the presence of any one but Peter, Sally, and Dobbin—and she was all three of them!

"Another very different poem called 'The Bird Nest' began:

" 'Hush, hush,' said a little brown thrush  
To her mate on the nest in the alder bush,  
'Keep right still. Don't open your bill,  
There's a boy coming bird-nesting over the hill.' "

"Here Geneva was bird, nest, bush, and boy. Here she was all eager excitement, or breathless, affrighted expectancy, followed by relief and, finally, soliloquy over future safety. These were the product of her imagination. No one taught her this. However, I presume we did encourage her, and she was so sincere and comical that it was well worth while to listen and observe."

All week the little girl ran wild, so that Sunday was rather a trial. Saturday evening the heavy brown hair

that hung in long braids almost to her knees had to be washed and wrapped on tins that poked her head, so that she would have curls for Sunday. The feet that had been bare all week and that were sore from scratches of berry vines and stone bruises had to be put into long stockings and heavy shoes. More underclothing was required than during the week, and a dress with a collar and long, tight sleeves. It is not much to be wondered at that the little wild thing sat in the country church in her uncomfortable clothing through the preaching and Sunday school, watching the sky, the clouds, listening to the birds and bees, catching the delightful odour of clover fields and new-mown hay as it drifted through the open windows, and wondering in her own mind if God was not outside rather than inside.

For the same reasons school was absolute torture. It was the next older sister Ada's task to accompany the crying, rebellious little sister to and from school, to wipe her tears, comfort, scold, persuade, and drag her through not only a few first days, but an entire month before there was any semblance of reconciliation or tolerance. Geneva used to slip off by herself at recess, take off her shoes and stockings, and rub her swollen, aching feet until the bell rang and she was forced to put them on again. One day her teacher, whom she thoroughly disliked, put a sentence on the blackboard for her to read, after explaining to the class that the sentence contained a valuable lesson and that little children would do well to follow it. The sentence read: "Little birds in their nests agree." The little girl read the sentence and, out of her wide experience with birds and in her great excitement, she almost shouted: "Oh, but they *don't* agree! They fight like everything! They pull feathers and

peck at each other's eyes until they are all bloody!"—and she was punished for contradicting the teacher and being disrespectful, although what she said was perfectly true.

But when she found that school was inevitable, and that she must make good grades or be the laughingstock of the older children, Geneva became a very good pupil. Later her teacher was her older sister, Florence, and Florence tells even now with much pride how happy she used to be to call on Geneva to recite, for she always knew her lesson and could be depended upon to give her answers correctly and to show the other children just how a proper recitation should be given.

At this time there was no one to look after the children but the father and Lemon, then only a boy. There was no one to care for the house but Ada and a young girl of her own age and Geneva. All the children went to school. The mother's health failed more noticeably, and she was only able to sit in her chair and direct the three little girls while they did the work, which was done in some way before and after school. The children took their lunches, and the father and mother had to manage the noon meal alone. Thus began the talk of moving to Wabash, a town some ten miles distant, where an older sister lived with her two children. The mother needed to be in daily contact with her doctor. The father was nearing the breaking point of his splendid physical development and health from bearing so many burdens and responsibilities, and the children needed better school privileges than the country schools afforded. So it was that the family left the farm in October, 1874, when Geneva was eleven years old.

## *Chapter IV*

### SCHOOL DAYS IN WABASH

THE move to Wabash meant selling the personal property, most of the stock, and renting the farm. This was like the end of the world to Father and Mother Stratton, the collapse of all their hopes and ambitions. But they saw it was the wisest way, and they made this new sacrifice with the same Christian fortitude and cheerful resignation that characterised their lives together.

The family first lived with an older daughter, Anastasia Taylor, so that the household consisted of eleven members: Mr. and Mrs. Taylor and their two children, a brother, Irvin, who was a law student and superintendent of public schools, Father and Mother Stratton, Florence, who was now back from music school, Ada, Lemon, and Geneva.

The city and the city schools were like another world to the children, but like all normal, rational children, they rapidly adapted and absorbed the new mode of life that surrounded them. There was no such thing as a trained nurse, and no such thing as a hospital, and despite their devoted and tender care and the best medical attention obtainable, the precious little mother slipped away from them in February, 1875, after seven years of invalidism and four months after leaving the farm. They took her back to Hopewell Cemetery and buried her in the family lot beside the children who had pre-



ceded her in death, whom she had so bravely borne, devotedly loved, and never ceased to mourn.

One of Geneva's school friends, Nellie Snaveley, writes me:

"I clearly recall the first day your mother came to the Wabash school. She was a perfect example of rugged health. Her eyes were keen and grey; her bright brown hair hung in two heavy braids; she wore a gay plaid dress and a white bib apron.

"Although she was usually very studious, she loved to draw. One day when she was thus engaged, the teacher asked: 'Geneva Stratton, what are you doing?'

"And Geneva replied: 'Why, bless your gizzard, only drawing a family of dolls!'

It was during her early school days in Wabash that Geneva's name was changed. Then, even as now, names had to be shortened, abbreviated, or made over in some way; so Geneva became Geneve, with the accent on the last syllable, which left the name with the same number of letters, but made it sound shorter.

Among her papers I have found one of her early school compositions, evidently written about this time. It is entitled "John Gower," and reads as follows:

"John Gower was born in 1330. He died in 1408. His last poem was written when he was seventy-two years old. As a child he was remarkable for being the homeliest that could be found; he had curls so long and *red* that the latter-day *auburn* as applied to them had no effect to make them any darker, and the usual insipid blue eyes and freckles that generally follow red hair. This gave to his face a peculiarly old and grave expression

that won for him the name 'Moral Gower.' His works are so long, so dull, so drawn out by repetitions that they are as interesting to read as an encyclopædia; some authors compare him to a secretary in a Court of Love. He wrote, or rather copied, for all his works are enlarged repetitions of other authors, with one eye glued on Aristotle and Ovid, the other on his manuscript. He strung poky old copied rhymes together in such a conglomeratic mass that even one flash of wit was so far sunk in the murky depths of four-syllable nouns and three double adjectives as to be lost forever. He wrote three books, one in Latin, one in French, the other in English; the first is lost, the second copied, and the third has no point. Dr. Ellas says it is 'quite paralysing.'

"Gower was the dullest, driest old poet that ever lived. His little stream of poetry that once feebly bubbled is now so far over-tided as to be lost forever. Poor, prosy old John, fit only as a prosy subject for a prosy composition! Let him rest on as he was laid away in the abbey, his three volumes for a pillow and the golden curls around his face, his small rosebud mouth smiling as sweetly as when on his bed of pain he saw the angels of love reaching forth their arms to gather him home.

"His epitaphs are as follows:

"Sleep on, sweet John,  
And take thy rest;  
God called thee home,  
He thought it best.

"He is gone, he's gone,  
As meek as any lamb.  
They took him, yes, they took him,  
To the arms of Abraham."

At the end of the first school year Father Stratton, Lemon, and the three girls moved into another house near the Taylor family. Florence had arranged the purchase of a new piano and was busily engaged in giving music lessons. Irvin joined his brother, Jerome, in his law practice in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Lemon went to Wabash College. This arrangement left the father with the three motherless daughters, Florence, Ada, and Geneve, the two latter going to school, doing the housework, and caring for the family as best they could.

A few years later Father Stratton, who was discontented in a rented house, bought a lot and built a home for them, so that they were much happier. In 1879 Ada was graduated from high school and Lemon came home from college, making another addition to the household. Geneve entered high school and was doing well in everything with the exception of mathematics. She had an amusing experience in her third year high school of which she writes:

"Friday afternoon was always taken up with an exercise called 'Rhetoricals'—a misnomer as a rule, but let that pass. Four years were required to complete the course, and each Friday afternoon the pupils of one of these years furnished entertainment for the assembled school faculty. Our subjects were assigned and we cordially disliked the essays, sketches, and stories we were compelled to write, always putting them off until the last minute and then scratching down anything that would serve and not cut our grades too badly. This particular day on which I was to have a paper, the subject assigned me was 'Mathematical Law.' I knew that mathematical laws were worked out with a precision that was some-

thing wonderful, one of the greatest of miracles. (I had heard of Kepler.) But I also knew that I never had passed any examination in mathematics by more than the 'skin of my teeth,' and that the subject had been given me purposely, and as punishment, by a professor who understood me so little that she never took into consideration that such a course on her part could only result in making me dislike it more.

"I put off the work until my paper had been called for three times to undergo preliminary reading by the professor. I truly had not access to works from which to prepare a proper paper, either in the school or home library. On the other hand, I had a brother-in-law who was a college man and a mathematical shark, and from him I might have secured all the material I needed; but I detested the subject and the professor who had forced me to more of it than my daily wrestle with trigonometry involved, so I came to Thursday night with excuses and not a line on paper. I was told to bring in my work Friday morning for her to glance over before I appeared on the platform with it. I went home in hot anger. Why in all this beautiful world wouldn't they help me to do the thing I could do, and let any one of four members of the class who revelled in mathematics do that subject? No doubt they had George Wilson, who could stand and solve mentally any proposition read to him, writing on migration or how to plant lilies! At study hour in the evening I was distracted, and there came a culmination.

" 'I can't do a paper on mathematics, and I won't!' I said stoutly. 'But I will do such a paper on a subject I *can* write about as will open their foolish eyes as to how wrong they are!'

"I picked up a pencil and began seeking some clue that would lead to a subject. My eyes fell on my loved book on the table before me, the most wonderful story of which was *Picciola*, by Saintine. Instantly I began to write. Breathlessly I wrote for hours. I exceeded the limit ten times over. I wrote pages on pages. The poor Italian count, the victim of political offences, shut by Napoleon from the wonderful grounds, mansion, and life that were his, restricted to bare prison walls at Lenistrella, deprived of books, pen, paper, his one interest in life a little sprout of green, sprung no doubt from a seed dropped by a passing bird between the stone flagging of the prison yard before his window, had always deeply stirred my imagination. With him I had watched it through the years I had had access to the book; with him I had prayed for it. I had broken into a cold sweat of fear when the jailer first menaced it; I had hated the wind that bent it roughly, and implored the sun, and sung a pæan of joy at its budding, and worshipped in awe before the thirty perfect blossoms. The count had named it 'Picciola,' the little one; to me also it was a personal possession—my little one. Well might that piece of work be proclaimed Saintine's masterpiece; no man could do a greater thing of its kind, and its kind happened to be kindred to my spirit. It was one of the things I knew more about than any teacher could teach me. That night we lived the life of our 'little one' over again, the count and I, and never were our anxieties and joys more poignant. At midnight I laid down the pencil and read what I had written. I could make no corrections. I had given my heart's best blood. It represented my brain's finest imaginings; it came in a tide, and to touch it was sacrilege. I copied my work



in ink, read it once more, and went to bed happy, in spite of my anxiety as to what would occur.

"Next morning I dared my crowd to see how long they could remain on the grounds and yet reach the room before the last toll of the bell. The scheme worked. Coming in so late, we frustrated the principal, and she began the opening exercises without remembering my paper. At noon I carried it home and read it twice more instead of eating my dinner, and each time I loved it better and saw new beauty in it. Again I was as late as I possibly dared be, and not seeing me the principal did not remember my paper until she came to my name and subject on her programme near the close of the exercises, through which I sat in cold fear. If things went too far in school, worse happened at home, as we children well understood. When she remembered my name, she looked at me meaningly, announced my inspiring mathematical subject, and called my name. I arose, walked to the front, and made my best bow to the principal, to the faculty, and to my schoolmates. Then I turned to her and said: 'I waited until the last minute because I knew absolutely nothing about my subject' (the audience laughed and she was forced to smile, so I continued with growing hope) 'and I could find nothing either in the library here or at home, so last night I reviewed Saintine's masterpiece, *Picciola*.'

"Then instantly I began to read. I was almost paralysed at my audacity and with each word I expected to hear a terse little interruption: 'You may report at the office!' Imagine my amazement when what I did hear at the turning of the first page was: 'Stop a minute!' Of course I stopped, and Miss Mary Bird, whom I had christened at the first glimpse of her 'The Merry Bird,'

left the room. A minute later she appeared with the superintendent of the city schools.

"'Begin again!' she said. 'Take your time.'

"I was too amazed to speak. Then thought came in a rush. *My paper was good.* It was as good as I had believed it. It was better than I had known. It was so good that an unprecedented thing had happened: the superintendent of the schools had been called from his office to hear it read. I glanced at him in consternation. Professor Thomas was a kindly man, and he smiled and nodded.

"'Go on!' he said.

"And maybe I didn't 'go on'! I lifted my proud head, opened the gates, and took that assembly room and the corps of teachers into our confidence, and the count and I told them all that was in our hearts about a little flower that sprang between the paving stones of a prison yard. The count and I were free spirits. From the book I had learned that. He got into political trouble through it, and I had got into mathematical trouble; and we told our troubles. One instant the room was in laughter; the next the boys turned their heads, and the girls who had forgotten their handkerchiefs cried into their aprons and were unashamed. At the turning of a sheet I stole a glance at the 'supe,' as we called him. As the oil ran down Jacob's beard even into his lap, so the tears were running down the professor's beard even into his lap! For almost sixteen big foolscap pages I held them, and I was eager to go on and tell them more about it when I reached the last line. Never again was a subject assigned to me; and if I had that paper to-day, I know four editors who would pay me very well for it!"

After such encouragement, her ever-present desire to write mounted to fever heat. She neglected everything else and wrote. She hid in her room at home, and she hid behind her books in school. She wrote a volume of verse fashioned after Meredith's *Lucile*, two novels, and a romantic book in rhyme, all during the time she should have been studying. When her grades fell threateningly low, she was forced to study, as her father would never have forgiven her the disgrace of a failure in school—her father who had taught her that whatever she started she must finish.

## *Chapter V*

### HER GIRLHOOD IN WABASH

IN 1880 Florence visited Rome City with Mrs. Kimmel, a friend of hers, and while there met Will Compton, the man whom she afterward married. Sylvan Lake at Rome City was one of the most frequented resorts of the state. The next year Mr. Compton invited Florence to meet him there for a vacation week, but she refused to do so unless she could take her two sisters, Ada and Geneve, with her. He at once wrote her to bring them, and he arranged for room and board for the three girls in a private house. Mr. Compton had been trying all year to make love to Florence, but she was slow about reciprocating and would not go to Rome City without her sisters as she wanted them to see him and find out what they thought about him. This was Geneve's first visit to the lake which she grew to love so intensely.

It was perhaps a letter from Geneve telling about the man their sister was engaged to that brought forth, some months later, the following very characteristic reply from Lemon, the tease of the family:

Springfield, Ohio,  
April 2, 1882.

MY DEAR SISTER GENEVE:

I received your most welcome letter yesterday and will write you this evening as I fear I will not have time during the week. I don't consider myself a very good hand

at writing letters, although Edith says I write splendid ones. I am glad you have a good impression of my little sweetheart, because sometime you might have to own her as a sister-in-law—that is, if she will consent to have me. I have never popped the question yet. I have sent her your picture, and will let you know what she thinks of you when I hear from her. One thing is certain, Geneve, if I ever do bring a wife into the family, I want to bring a *woman*, not a silly-pated fashion block like one of our brothers has.

I suppose that you and I will soon be all that is left of the Stratton family, that is if Florence and Ada should both launch on the sea of Matrimony. I want you to give Ada my most sincere benediction on her engagement. I am unable to say anything about Flora's fellow as I have never seen him, but I don't see how she is going to marry him without marrying the four kids, too, and according to my tell that is rather more than the contract calls for.

I should like so much to come home and see you all, and if I had anything to do at home that I could earn a living at, I would come and stay. I don't like this business anyway; you may work as hard as you can and you get no credit for it. You are still nothing but a book agent. I might just as well not have gone to college at all if I am to put in my time in this way. Any fool can sell books.

I don't like my employer at all. He has a wife and baby at home and it's a shame the way he acts around here, trying to go with all the girls he meets. Of course, you must not say anything about this, as I am compelled to be with him a good deal and, of course, must get along with him the best I can.



Write me soon and tell me all the news. With love to all, I am,

Your brother,  
LEMON.

In October, 1882, Florence was married to Mr. Compton and they moved to Coldwater, Michigan. In the summer of 1883 Geneve went again to Rome City to visit Florence and her husband, who were camping on the lake shore in a tent, returning with them to their home in Michigan for a visit.

It was during this year that Mrs. Taylor, with whom they had lived, was taken very ill. Geneve missed the last three months of school that year because of having to nurse her sick sister, who died in the spring. Of this she wrote:

“Like Thoreau, I never worried over diplomas, and unlike most school children, I studied harder after leaving school than ever before, and in a manner that did me real good. I never went to school again, and the best that can be said of what education I have is that it was strictly private. It was the very best kind in the world for me; the only possible kind that would not have ruined a person of my inclinations. I studied the things in which I was most interested and whenever I had the opportunity, having at my command my brother's library and the libraries of the school and town. I have always been too thankful for words that circumstances saved my brain from being run through a groove in company with dozens of others of widely differing tastes and mentalities. What measure of success I have had comes through preserving my individual point of view, method of expression, and the Spartan regulations of my child-

hood home. Whatever I have been able to do has been done through the line of education my father was able to give me, and through my parents' methods of rearing me."

After Mrs. Taylor's death, her husband was left with two motherless children and no one to care for them; so Father Stratton, Ada, and Geneve again moved in with the Taylors. Later in the same year Ada was married, and she expected to move into a home of her own; but, much to her consternation, she found Geneve rebellious, declaring that if Ada left the home, she would leave it, too; either she and her father would live with Ada and her husband, or Ada and her husband would stay with them. Furthermore, Father Stratton was of the same opinion; so they all stayed with the Taylors. Lemon married and left the family that spring, and about that time they discovered the bereaved widower seeking solace in courting a widow of the neighbourhood.

They were a great household that year: the widower in love and courting; his two motherless children; and the bride and groom hopelessly and helplessly mixed up with "her family"; the ageing father, and Geneve, the youngest, doing her best to help them all, and trying to steal some time for her own study and ambitions.

During it all Father Stratton was the balance wheel; not once did his Christian grace waver or his faith falter. Ada says: "Had it not been for blessed old Father, most surely we would have shipwrecked upon the shoals of our taut nerves, strained mentality, and generally overwrought capabilities."

Early in December, 1883, while walking down town on an icy pavement, Geneve caught her foot in the

hinge of a grating. She was wearing her new winter wrap—what was known as a "Russian circular," a long silk-padded cape with fur collar and small pockets in the lining of either side. The fingertips were supposed to be placed in these pockets in order to hold the cape well down over the shoulders and arms and insure a trim fit across the back, as well as close the front for warmth. That was well enough in theory, but not practical, for with her hands thus confined and her foot fast in the hinge, Geneve fell heavily without being able to catch herself. She was unconscious when she was picked up, and was found to have cracked her skull. For weeks her family despaired of saving her, but her wonderful constitution came to her rescue, and after three months she was able to walk about with the use of a cane. Her lovely hair had to be shingled close to her head, and she wore dark glasses for some time on account of the weakened condition of her eyes.

About this time Mr. Taylor was married. Ada, who was dissatisfied with the arrangement anyway, declared that this was the time for them to leave the Taylors and move back into their own home. So once more Father Stratton, Ada and her husband, and Geneve moved back into the home that Father Stratton had built.

Geneve had no beaux worthy of mention. There was much fun and frolic among the young people, but society in those days was very different from that of to-day. There was neither card-playing nor dancing in the homes. Those things were just beginning to be tried out, and in most of the homes neither entertainment was permissible at all. There was one party where the crowd first learned to dance a sort of simple little waltz that would

be a scorn and contempt of to-day. There were many parties, but no pairing off into couples. They were just a jolly bunch of girls and boys together, and a party at one home meant that the whole bunch of young people would appoint a certain home for a meeting place and then all go in a crowd to the party. In homes where there were pianos the young folks sang. Their renditions of such old favourites as "The Merry Farmer Boy," "Paddle Your Own Canoe," and "Have Courage, My Boy" could be heard for blocks. When the party was over, they all left at the same time, romping and chasing each other around, until every one had dropped out at their own homes.

Geneve never manifested any particular interest in boys. She laughed and joked with all of them, but had no favourites. However, she always had some particularly intimate girl friend, who always came first. Once she visited a Scotch family in Elkhart, Indiana, where she met a young man who was rather persistent with letters and flowers when she returned home; but, after a time, she gave him the absent treatment by failing to answer his letters.

Some idea of the conventional formality that existed in those days can be gained from the following notes which Geneve received from her school friends. Witness this specimen, written with copybook precision, the letters carefully shaded and the whole ornamented with the most extravagant flourishes:

#### COMPLIMENTS

Compliments of Harry E. Williams to Miss Geneve Stratton, and would ask the pleasure of calling some

evening that would best suit her. If not convenient will consider a silence a polite negative. But as I said before it would be a great pleasure.

Respectfully,

HARRY E. WILLIAMS,

Permanent address:

Warsaw, Indiana.

Tremont House, Wabash.

Evidently, the sedate Mr. Williams found it difficult to maintain such formal expression for very long, for his last sentence falls into a more easy and natural style, which gives the whole a lightening touch of humour.

Another note from her best friend's beau runs as follows:

Wabash, Indiana.

October 27, 1884.

GENEVE:

Whenever it will suit your pleasure Thayer and I would like to pay our obligation that we made. I will bring Jessie and the "fiddle" along, and we will have bananas and music for dessert. Let me know at your earliest convenience.

Yours respt.,

CHAS. ROSE.

Geneve was an exceedingly attractive and beautiful young woman. She had very keen, penetrating grey eyes with brown spots in them—"cat eyes," as she used to call them. She had unusually heavy black eyebrows, a trait of the Stratton family, which came together across her nose, and two heavy braids of brown hair which hung like ropes to her knees. Often her abundant hair was braided in many small braids which made waves when



allowed to hang loose, floating about her and enveloping her like a mermaid. She was not allowed the use of cosmetics of any kind, but she had abundant colouring and a natural bloom of youth and health which made her a vivid and striking picture.

After her recovery from her fall, she and Ada used to get up early each morning and take a long walk before they returned home to get the breakfast. Ada, who was never away from her more than three weeks from the time Geneve was born until she was married, says:

"We had many jokes between ourselves and usually at some one's else expense, for we could always see funny things, and we often held our sides and laughed until the tears rolled down our cheeks. We were required to go to church services on Sunday and several times during the week, and I recall that we once laughed aloud in church when a very bald-headed man took his umbrella and used the crook on the handle to scratch the top of his head because a fly persisted in alighting there.

"During high school days, a snobbish girl in the graduating class snubbed Geneve and her particular girl friend. Apparently they did not resent it at the time; but it was near Commencement. A commencement in those days meant the largest church packed to capacity, a stage where the seniors sat, each arising in turn to read her essay or deliver his oration. Between each essay or oration was either a song or a recitation during which the 'floral bearers' gathered from the audience their offering of flowers to the 'sweet girl graduate' or the embryo President of the United States, heaping them in front of and around the graduates until they looked like the horticultural display at the county fair.

"Geneve and her friend were present at the Commencement with numerous bouquets for their favourites, and when the snobbish one sat down, having covered herself with smug pride and glory, they managed to send up to her, unnoticed, the most insignificant, straggling bunch of flowers tied with a string, accompanied by a note conspicuously attached, which read:

"MISS BLANK:

"Will you please make me happy by accepting these flowers, not for their intrinsic value or beauty, but as a token of sincere admiration for your loveliness.

(Signed) ADMIRER.

"Fate was with the mischief makers, for the unattractive bunch of flowers dropped away from the others, making the note very noticeable. The young lady slyly picked it up and then began a smirking, smiling search for a responsive face in the audience, which, of course, was never located. In the meanwhile, the two girls crouched low in their places, smothering their laughter so that they would not be suspected."

Geneve confided to her father her ambitions to write, and if she timidly slipped to him with a composition or a faulty poem, he always saw some good in it and made helpful suggestions for its improvement. She loved brilliant colour and once decided that she wanted to paint. So Father Stratton went to an artist, who designed an easel for him, and he personally superintended the building of it, and then provided the necessary funds for lessons in painting. Many years later, on that same easel, she painted the water colours for the illustrations in *Moths of the Limberlost*, and one of the most poignant regrets of her life was that her father could not know the

eventual use of the easel that he had builded out of his faith in her.

When she wanted to try music as a method of self-expression, her father at once detected hidden ability that should be developed and immediately started her taking lessons. Through all the days of struggle and unrest, he remained firm in his belief that she was going to do something good for the world and that he would be very remiss in his duty to her if he did not help. It was he who demanded a physical standard that developed the strength to endure the rigours of scientific field work; it was he who demanded of her from birth the "finishing" of any task she attempted; it was he who taught her to cultivate patience, to watch and wait; and it was he who, in his home and in his church, taught her courage, honesty, honour, and "all things whatsoever"; it was he who daily lived before her the life of such a man as she portrayed in *The Harvester*, and who constantly used every atom of his brain and body power to help and encourage all men to do the same.

After the dainty little mother died, Mark Stratton was never interested in any other woman, and he cherished her memory tenderly and devotedly until his death. Geneve came home from school one afternoon crying bitterly, and when asked the trouble replied that one of the girls had said her father was going to be married again. Florence and Ada were much distressed, and finally they decided that Florence, being the eldest, should ask Father Stratton about the matter. After several hours, she coaxed her courage to the "sticking point" and told him all about it on their way to prayer meeting.

Father Stratton merely said: "I don't know who

would start such a report. I am not thinking of anything of the kind. I know how my children feel on that subject, and I cannot afford to risk losing their love."

Florence still remembers how she fidgeted during the prayer meeting—she was so anxious to get home to tell the good news to Ada and Geneve. The subject was never mentioned again during the seventeen years Father Stratton lived after the death of his beloved Mary. As he grew older he conformed to all the changes and necessities of the family needs and wishes without a murmur or complaint, but willingly and joyfully, and his faith and forbearance never faltered in his effort to be both father and mother to the motherless children.

In July, 1884, Reverend Wilkinson and his family, who were close friends of the Strattons, visited in Wabash. Their daughter, Cora Wilkinson, was just Geneve's age, and they were very congenial. The Wilkinsons were on their way to Sylvan Lake at Rome City, Indiana, where they had a cottage, and they invited Geneve to go with them for a vacation, thus making her third pilgrimage to the spot.

## *Chapter VI*

### THE YOUNG DRUGGIST OF GENEVA

OF Geneve's appearance that summer in Rome City her older sister Florence says:

"I can just see her as she looked then: she was still carrying her cane and was wearing her dark glasses part of the time, but in spite of these she was a very striking figure. The shingled hair, which had grown to a reasonable length in the months since her fall, was piled high on her head; her keen grey eyes and heavy brows gave her a very different look from any one else. She wore a black dress, shorter than was the rule for girls at that time, and either on her shoulder or at her throat she always wore a large bunch of goldenrod or black-eyed susans, which grew abundantly in the woods along the lake shore. . . . She was always noticed and commented upon by all who saw her."

At that time Rome City was a very busy place. The G. R. & I. railroad, which owned the lake, conducted a Chautauqua during the summer season in a big outdoor auditorium. The building, which was located on an island in the lake reached by a picturesque bridge from the mainland, was open on all sides, so that the quiet summer beauty of the water and the green shore line made a pleasant background for the programmes by nationally renowned artists which were given daily. There were music and lectures, singing, orchestral con-



certs—all kinds of entertainment, in fact, and many people were attracted to the spot, so that the hotels were usually filled and the overflow had to move back to the mainland and live in tents. This colony was called Tentland.

The Wilkinsons, with whom Geneve was staying that summer, had a cottage on the lake shore. The two young girls indulged in boating, swimming, fishing, and all the outdoor games and attractions usual to summer resorts. The lake itself presented a gay picture; a sentence from a letter to Geneve written by her brother-in-law, Mr. Taylor, while she was away on her vacation, gives a vivid description of the "entrancing pleasures of lakes and boats, the splashing of oars, and the echoing peals of joyous laughter from friendly and strange voices, camps and camp equipage, breezy forests, and waves dancing in the sunlight, music and addresses, the busy throng of pleasure seekers, or the quiet cosy evening cot of the camp," all of which Geneve, with her love of the outdoors, enjoyed with young ardour. She became expert at rowing a boat. The two girls made many trips to the end of the lake, where they gathered yellow and white water lilies. Geneve was also an enthusiastic fisherwoman, enjoying equally fishing herself or rowing a boat for her friends while they cast for the black bass that lurked near the surface of the water underneath the overhanging branches. She and Cora often packed their lunch and started out in a boat early in the morning, and the family did not see them again until dark.

It was during this summer that Charles Dorwin Porter, then a flourishing young druggist of Geneva, Indiana, who was on a vacation at the lake with a party of his cousins, first saw Geneve. He was deeply at-

tracted by the girl's vivid young beauty and her marked personality, which singled her out from the crowd. Mr. Porter's two cousins were Miss Fanny Dorwin and Will Winch, the fourth member of their party being Miss Bertha Halloway, a chum of Miss Dorwin's who was engaged to Mr. Winch. Will Winch was a "regular fellow" with one eye open for all the pretty girls; and Bertha and Fanny were not so far behind him. But Mr. Porter was older and a little more sedate. He noticed Geneve among the crowds and kept telling the others in his party what a good-looking girl she was and how he would love to meet her.

Will Winch proceeded to tell him how to go about it, and they all had a great time teasing him, but he concluded the suggested methods would never do: they might "queer" him forever with the girl. Finally, Will came up to the crowd one day and said: "Say, Porter, I've got this thing all fixed up and can tell you anything you want to know. I sidled up to that Mr. Compton and introduced myself. As it happens, he knows all about my family and yours, too, and that girl you are admiring so much is his sister-in-law, Geneve Stratton, of Wabash. And what's more, she's got a 'come-hither' look in her eye for you, so now just brace up like a man and sail in."

Mr. Porter made up his mind he would, but it so happened that they all left the lake the next day, Mr. Porter and his party being on the same coach on the same train with Geneve and the Comptons, who travelled with her as far as Fort Wayne, where Geneve got off the train in order to spend a few days with her brother Irvin and his family. Mr. Porter also left the train at Fort Wayne, and it so happened that the next morning, as Geneve was

standing at the gate to her brother's front yard, Mr. Porter chanced to ride by on horseback. Their eyes met and they recognised each other; but neither had the courage to speak.

After a short visit with her brother, Geneve went on North to visit the Wilkinsons, who had returned home, and while with them she received her first letter from Mr. Porter which was forwarded to her from Wabash. Remembering the formalities and rigid conventions of those days, as one reads this first letter it is easy to guess in what trepidation and with what fearful misgivings it was written.

Geneva, Indiana,  
Sept. 18, 1884.

MISS GENEVIEVE STRATTON:

There are certain instances occur during our lives that prompt us to do some very foolish things. "Human creatures are prone to err," and the writer is no exception.

Having been rather favourably impressed with your appearance, I venture the forwardness to address you. Barring the rules of etiquette and asking your pardon, I would respectfully solicit a correspondence from you. You may ask my object. "Echo answers." We will trust to *fate* for the outcome. You will perhaps wonder as to where I have seen you. Allow me to explain as follows: I saw you during the assembly at Rome City 26th to 29th of July last, and was aboard the same train on which you took your departure southward. You will perhaps remember seeing two couples at various times, and they were more particularly noticeable from the noise they made while on board train. I am the smaller gent of the two, of rather *thin* (excuse me) form, and

wearing a light moustache. We were a party of cousins.

I am engaged in the drug trade, my headquarters being here; however, I have a branch store at 106 Fairfield Avenue, Fort Wayne, Indiana, where I spend a few days occasionally. I have a brother, Dr. M. F. Porter, who is located and connected with the medical college at that city. Am known but little outside of business circles. Am well known at Decatur, Indiana, my old home. An old friend of our family and one who has known me from infancy, one Joseph Crabbs, now resides at Wabash, Indiana.

May I hope to have a line from you? or do you think I have overreached all bounds of propriety as a great many young (and old ones as well) Americans have done before me? A letter will reach me here or at 106 Fairfield Avenue, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Very respectfully,  
CHAS. D. PORTER.

In the ten days that intervened before he received Geneve's reply to his letter, Mr. Porter confided to Miss Dorwin his hopes and fears as to its reception. She writes me:

"Your mother replied almost immediately to Cousin Charles's letter, and I will never forget how excited he was when he came down to Decatur and showed me the letter. Later, as their friendship progressed, he let me read others. They were really quite wonderful letters for a young girl to write, and Charles was so proud of them."

Geneve's first letter, which follows, is imbued with a sweet seriousness and an ingenuous frankness, and re-

flects the wholesome sanity which always characterised its writer.

Wabash, Indiana,  
September 28, 1884.

MR. PORTER:

Your letter was forwarded to me in the North, where I was spending the last days of my summer vacation, almost a week ago. As I was coming home so soon, I preferred to bring it here, and in the quiet rest of home, think a while before I wrote. And I feel now what I have so often and so keenly felt before: if I only had a mother to go to for advice! How I envy other girls!

I remember the general outline of your face and figure. Friday, when I came over the G. R. & I. road to Wayne, I saw the very place where you gathered the ferns and grasses for the ladies. How badly I wanted some, too! And when I thought of a letter in my writing case, I surely believed that there was something new under the sun. If you ever even *glanced* at me, I was totally *unconscious* of the fact, and had you not mentioned being on the train, I should not have remembered you. But if you noted me sufficiently to remember me this long, then I am sure that you saw also that I behaved in a quiet and ladylike manner. But can I keep it if I correspond with an entire stranger?

I cannot exactly see any harm, but won't you please not ask me to write again unless you are *certain* you can respect me as *much* as if you had formed my acquaintance in the authorised way? The family I was visiting when your letter came once lived in Decatur and knew your mother and you, as a younger man. I have heard my brother Irvin, who lives in Wayne, speak of a Dr. Porter. I think he knew his wife as a girl. My father



is intimately acquainted with Mr. Crabbs, but if you meant me to inquire of *you* from him, I'd rather not. If I contemplate such a possibility as ever being friends with you to such an extent as that your life past or present affects me, then I only know of one person who could really be a competent informer—yourself. I prefer information from headquarters.

There is nothing to tell, but I feel like telling you at once all I know about myself. I am my father's youngest and only unmarried child. My father and I, with my next older sister Ada and her husband, Frank, form our household. I have three sisters and a brother who is all that's good and one who is all that's bad. My father is an Englishman and he is just the best, truest, dearest old Christian gentleman I ever knew. I adore my father; he is all I have, and in his care I have been shielded from many of the world's hardest blows. Our home here, and me, is all my father has left of a beautiful home and a large family. My father adored my mother. She is without eulogy; there is none to write it. As he speaks of her, her life was sublime. She was his love, his comfort, his joy in life's bright hours; his stay, his support in dark ones. So essential to his life, so dear to his heart, for eleven years he has walked—not alone, but in her presence, in her life, in the sunshine of her way. I am his all and, in that he sometimes calls me "Mary," read the secret of his dear love for his baby.

I have nothing to relate. He has had me well educated in the necessary and artificial things of life. I do not suppose I am very good, but I am sure that my life is an open page. I have yet to perform an act that I blush to tell to my father; so I am sure your trust in me will not be broken.

I do not believe you would know me now. Please offer me your congratulations. I have almost completely recovered from the effects of an accident from which I was suffering at Rome City, and it makes me a happy, happy girl.

I beg that you remember the circumstances under which I write are embarrassing and not judge this letter harshly. When my brother found that I was answering your letter, he wanted to know if I was sure I was not, to use his expression, "being gayed." Of course, I could not see any reason why you should write me unless you cared for the amusement it would afford you, and I thought your letter the work of a gentleman. I told him so.

I scarcely know why I have written you—a woman's greatest reason is sometimes—"Because!" But I hope you will be pleased, and if I've been good to write you a long, long letter, "at an early date," "go thou and do likewise."

Very truly yours,  
GENEVE STRATTON.

In November, 1884, she wrote:

HONOURED SIR:

Don't that look immense? I have written "Mr. Porter" till it reminded me of a grasshopper swinging on a straw. I cry up to you to-day from the depths of misery and red flannel and despair. I had one cold and caught two more. I am a candidate for lung fever with good chances for election.

"Angry at you?" Do you remember when, a little boy at school, you stood behind *McGuffy's Second Reader* and ground out in jerky, barrel-organ style the

beautiful poem, "Hear the children gaily shout," etc.? The lines which apply are these:

"Angry? No, indeed," said she.

"This is only sport for me!"

We are a little agitated about the election. I hope I am not a fool, but do you know that I really had an idea that in case of Democratic success the sun would stand still or the sky turn green or something burst open? I actually believe, as our martyred President said, that "God rules and the government at Washington still lives," but I had a vague idea that it would not. Well, the Democrats have elected their No. 19 collar, and I hope he will be a fizzle. This is my very first experience with a Democratic President. I was born in Lincoln's time. The Democrats jollified all over the states. There were large circulars out here stating that "After twenty-four years out, we are at last *in*," etc.

My father is well, better than before his illness, so I am happy again. I did have a glorious old day at Thanksgiving. I do not know as I felt unusually happy until I awoke that morning. Before I arose I got to thinking. Taking into consideration my situation last year as compared with this, my recovered health and happiness, I concluded that I ought to be very thankful. As I firmly believe that human beings themselves create their own woes, I resolved to create my own joys. I got right down on my knees and thanked God first of all, and then went in for my happy day; and I had it. Was it a bad day? I thought it fine.

No, I did not cook the turkey. We did not have one. Sunday we were all out for dinner, also Monday and Tuesday. Wednesday we gave a dinner for one of



*At ten, at sixteen, and at twenty*





our guests who was suddenly called home, and by Thursday—well, I heard one lady remark to her husband that she did hope the girls would not “turkey” them again, as they were all sick of eating. I concocted a scheme to make them enjoy their dinner. It was *bad*. Twelve—one—two, and no dinner. Oh! how sick they looked! I set a plain table with no loaded appearance and after soup Ada served a couple of broiled fowls and I fried oysters. Eat! You never saw the equal! And no one saw the point! *Was* it a joke!

Later I went to the post office. I didn’t get a letter I was expecting, but I did get a bundle from you. Many thanks. It is sweet to be remembered, especially when others forget you.

I think, Mr. Porter, that it is very hard to correspond with you—hard on *me*, I mean. I know nothing of your opinions or ideas and have simply to walk in the dark. Some day I will be sure to attack your pet theory and hidden secrets (of course I’ll demolish them and thereby make myself obnoxious to you). Suppose I *prefer* being your friend? Is it not a little hard for me? However, I shan’t pine over it.

Yesterday I made a pie! and an apron! Just gaze on that! My first experience. Lemon pie. And it was just a James Dandy pie, too. And the nicest gingham apron. Father says I may be of some use yet. (I don’t feel very good over this. I have told the truth, but I haven’t told it all. I made some cookies *and they were not fit to eat!*)

What do *you* know about broomsticks? To-day Father came into the dining room to read to me while I worked and directly I caught him laughing. He said I moved about with as much dignity as if I were in a

palace. I straightway asked him if he had never heard of the "dignity of labour." I don't *like* housekeeping, by any means, but if I *have* to do it I mean to march it through. In fact, I think a little more of myself since I have made a pie than I did before. Victor Hugo says, "There are no bad herbs or bad men; only bad cultivators." I have been wondering if some of the drudgery of housework was not due to bad housekeepers rather than an evil of itself.

I have your photo and your nice long letter. Do you care for my opinion of your picture? To be honest, I did not know you were—so handsome. The hair line along the temples, the forehead, eyes, and brow are simply *beautiful*. The nicest thing I can say about your forehead is it's almost as handsome as my father's. A classic nose and invisible mouth. But I never saw a face so full of contradictions. I fell in love with your forehead and eyes at once; but I would rather take a "header" than do battle with your chin. It's awful! I have tried all my persuasive arts on it, and even "sassed back," and it won't budge. I would not have such a horrid old chin—looks as cross as fury—say, Mister, would you bite?

Did you say you had a letter twelve pages long? How awful! Some hoyden of a girl must have written it. If I were you I wouldn't answer it, or else I'd lecture her on the proprieties, as my father does me.

If I asked for anything that was expensive or hard to procure, don't get it. My gentlemen friends are all very grateful to me for never getting the "bangle" craze, and I don't want to persecute them in any other line. One poor fellow told me the other day that he had bought seven bangles at \$2.00 apiece. He said it had

about resolved itself into a question of whether you would get a girl a bangle or get cut from her list.

Mr. Porter, I have a crow to pick with you, and I may as well begin. It seems odd that I should defend you against yourself, and yet—you have said several times “if I am bad,” “no saint,” “not good,” and all such expressions. Now, if you *are* bad, I cannot be your friend. Real badness is unrighteousness, licentiousness, or drunkenness. Now I am sure you are none of that, so you are not *bad* and you must not say that to me. Again, several times you have reflected on your timidity. Well, sir, if it was *wrong* in you to write to *me*, what, oh, what, was it in me to answer?

You compel me to tell you what I think on that subject. I think differently from most people; so prepare to be shocked. To address a lady without an introduction is regarded as a breach of etiquette. And etiquette is simply social rules made by society people. How much better a man, or how much worthier of my friendship would you be had some one presented us to each other? I am willing to forgive in any man what I would do myself, and were I a free man and at any place or time saw a face or form that attracted me, and I desired to know and to make the possessor my friend—well, I would, if it were in the range of possibility. And I believe that society stripped of half its shams and social form would stand refined and purified—or else a ghastly skeleton.

I am sorry that my mention of Christmas recalls sad memories. I have heard your mother most highly spoken of by several ladies, but *I* cannot comfort you. The sacred name seldom falls from my lips—its greatest memory to me is a pale face and a hushed room followed

by that never-ending sleep. I cannot remember more. One great childish pain, and that is all I have in memory of Mother. Yet as I see others I know what I have lost. When my proud, beautiful sister bends over her baby in mother love, I feel as I do when my best friend looks into her lover's eyes—that the two best things of all the earth are not yet come into my life.

I have been writing you a letter once in two weeks. Did you mean by "a letter soon" sooner than that? I have hours of spare time and could have written a little before this if you desire.

Very truly yours,  
GENEVE STRATTON.

P. S. I eatum crow. I think *your chin is adorable!*  
(He! He! He!)

Wabash, Indiana,  
June 6, 1885.

### *Directions*

This epistolary effusion is to be taken at one dose—the patient to be placed in a reclining chair, pillow under the head, slippered feet at an angle of  $23\frac{1}{2}$ , best Havana and palm leaf.

And please don't look sour; it isn't a pill—it's going to be real nice, because I am real nice myself (my temper, I mean—for the rest, how would a "white or light coloured Mother Hubbard with red stripes on the waist" do?).

If you dare to come to Rome in one of those little crumpled up, measly, old-fashioned, bed-ticking coats, I'll get a "yeller" canvas Ma Hubbard with ten widths

in the skirt and trot right at your heels all over the Island!

I attend Commencement by *special* invitation. I almost finished the course, but by the sickness and death of my sister, did not graduate. You wouldn't look at me if you *were* here; my dress is made *whole*; I'll wear it the first time you come to call on me at Rome City and let you see if you think it's pretty. If Ada doesn't get worse than she is now, I'll surely get to go. Am I really to see you at last? It seems awfully long. I'd laugh if I'd get scared and *run* at the last moment. Won't you please wear one of those little silk caps and look *just* like you did last year? Transport your Saratoga on a dray—that's the way *I* do. Duke Fisher will save you a room and do everything for you; he's a real good clerk.

"An armful of caramels"—Mr. Porter, I do not question your ability to *give*; but how about mine to *receive*? I am *deeply* in debt to you now. How far in do you want to get me? I'll get Cora to go on my bond, and if I prove bankrupt, you can *collect from her*. You must only bring a few.

Now, Sir Knight, here is coming your longed-for opportunity to "display your gallantry"—emergencies equal to "caves and mountains." Don't be scared. I am not looking for helmets and plumes; a simple, honest, earnest man will amply fill my idea of my "friend." But *please* don't *talk* or *think* of *only* "two or three" days. That's too awful short. It isn't time to get the *shy* off.

I am so glad you liked the picture. I love Cora so dearly that I feel as if I had been praised myself. I'll faithfully transmit what you say of it. "Those lips look tempting." (?) What *will* you do when you get in easy



range of them, laughing, dimpled, red—I like to kiss Cora myself. Mr. Porter, you will find her a *very beautiful* girl, but as long as I've known her, I don't *pretend* to understand her and never expect to. Part of her features *are* faultless. She has masses of golden hair and big, babyish dark eyes; in manner very reserved and quiet, and when she gets an idea, the stubbornest person I *ever* knew. I find but one fault with her: she *satisfies herself*. She won't *progress*. To me, who has cried whole pillows full because I couldn't go to college, it seems *incredible* to see a girl petted, bribed, and threatened, and *won't* go. She won't study and she won't read. She *never* read a novel. I don't read swish-swash either; but I *do* get my pictures of ancient Florence from *Romola*, of revolution from Hugo, of art from Bulwer, of incident from Dumas. All the histories I ever read never gave me such an idea of Scotland and her hero Wallace as does Jane Porter's *Scottish Chiefs*. I wouldn't miss the privilege of reading such books for the world.

Coe and I certainly gravitate by the law of contrasts—I amuse and enliven her; she soothes and quiets me. She says: "I am content; you are ambitious." She is an extremely beautiful girl. She reminds me of the quicksands—you're in before you know it.

Now, my best Doctor says *I am labelled*. He says every movement of my body, every change of my face, every light in my eyes, label me "Dangerous," "Beware," "Breakers ahead," etc. People *never* "*fall in love*" with me; they either cut and run, first off, or calmly and deliberately stay and take their chances.

But there *is* no mischief in Coe's deep, dark eyes, no

warning in her calm, quiet manner. People *do fall* in love with *her*. First thing they know, it's a case of

My heart is gone and I'm forlorn,  
Her darling face has won me!

I am aware that sooner or later I must lose my *friend* to supply some girl with a *lover*; but I am not afraid that you will ever love Coe—not in *that* way. I think you *will* love and admire and pet her; but unless I am *sadly* mistaken in my estimate of your character, formed from your portraits and letters, you'll never "*fall*" in love with *any girl*, and *never* Coe. Tell me truly, Mr. Porter, in what I have expressed to you as my opinion of you, haven't I come pretty near the mark sometimes?

Mercy, what a long letter! I'll send you papers after Commencement. Will your Cousin Will be at Rome City? Bet *he'd* fall in love with Coe in three days. My compliments and regards, etc. Hope you are well and happy and not too busy to write me a nice, *long* Sunday letter. I didn't intend such a big dose when I began. Hope it won't kill you.

Yours,  
GENE.

## *Chapter VII*

### HER ROMANCE

THE next summer, 1885, Geneve was again in Rome City with her friend Cora Wilkinson, during which time Mr. Porter was there for a week. This summer the romance flamed and flourished. Florence was also in Rome City with her husband and little girl. She writes of how Mr. Porter brought a whole bunch of bananas down from Fort Wayne and hung them in front of the Wilkinsons' cottage. Every time they came over to visit Florence, they brought bananas for little Hazel, who was a beautiful child, and of whom they were both very fond.

One day, while on a boat ride, as Geneve was getting out of the boat, Mr. Porter noticed that she had on a petticoat made of blue and white striped bed-ticking, such as his mother used on her beds. Florence says:

"He could not understand this; it did not appeal to him in the least, and in fact, he disliked it so much that he almost 'threw up the sponge.' After they were engaged, he courageously asked Geneve how she had happened to be wearing that kind of a skirt. She very proudly informed him that it was the latest style and made purposely for the occasion. I remember the skirt very clearly. It was starched stiffly in order to hold out the dress skirt, with three small ruffles across the back which formed a small bustle, and three full ruffles about

four inches wide entirely around the bottom, the whole back width being ruffled from top to bottom."

During Geneve's absence at the lake, Ada and her husband purchased a new home in Wabash and moved into it in August. Father Stratton went on a visit to his brother, Daniel. When Geneve returned in the fall, she found all her belongings in the new house. In September of that year Ada's first baby was born, Father Stratton's visit being planned purposely at this time so that he might be away when the baby arrived and while the nurse was with them.

Mr. Porter came down several times that fall and winter to see Geneve. He was responsible for the third change of her name, this time from Geneve to Gene. She liked this name very much, and it was in deference to her wishes that the family all accepted and used the name Gene to the exclusion of any other name. Ada relates an amusing incident in connection with the new name:

"One of the best jokes and the most lasting we ever got on Gene was when she was most interested in her courtship and most pleased at being called Gene by her lover. Florence made us a visit with her little girl, who was then just two years old. Gene promised the child a new doll if she would call her 'Aunt Gene.' The doll was purchased and held before the expectant and delighted child, who evidently summoned every ability to do the thing exactly right, and came forth with an emphatic, 'A't *Jane!*' The look of horror on the child's face as she realised her mistake, and the surprise and chagrin on Gene's were pictures to behold, and neither child nor young woman was spared the uproarious laughter of the family. Years afterward to be called 'Aunt Jane'

never failed to bring a blush and an embarrassed smile, as Jane at that time was on a par with Sarah, both being considered the very worst of all old-fashioned names."

Some of the letters that were written by the two young lovers at this time follow:

September 18, 1885.

MR. PORTER:

So you find fault with my manner of addressing you and are going to make me change it or know the reason why? Possibly if you understood me *better*, you would not hurt my feelings by such a statement. Your people, your cousins, your aunts, call you "Charlie," but why should I? You are not "Charlie" to me, and I would rather not call you that. "Mr. Porter," as I say it, is not only an address, but in a dignified way and ladylike manner tells you that the friendship I bear you is not the genial rowdyism of to-day, but a thing tempered with the respect I feel for you, the honour that I have for you, and even the little bit of awe that rests for me in your cold blue eyes and that I cannot always help feeling. Did you ever hear of the man who carried a priceless diamond in his pocket for months and thought it a common pebble? There is nothing so blind as a man, and if he is *trying* to see, he is worse still. To my mind, I have given you the best that any true woman has to offer, and I doubt if ever before any woman bestowed on you more respect, more honour, or more affection than I do when I simply say "Mr. Porter."

If I was absolutely certain that I was wanted there, and still more certain that I wanted myself there, I'd see if I could not get way down in the depths of your nature and teach you a few little lessons that, in your boasted



bachelor indifference, you never can dream of. It is something to understand, but far more to be understood.

Young man, no slams on a "scolding woman!" You take ten lovely girls, sweet tempered, young, and bright; put them for ten years in the hands of men (who work hard to get them), and at the end of that time find them pale, sallow, hollow-eyed, round-shouldered, health gone, big family—and *what's* the matter? Why, they've been "supported, cherished, loved and protected" according to the vows of a man. Scold? Great Cæsar! Of course they scold! But take the happy, rosy woman of thirty and she goes around telling all the girls to get married and how lovely a man is. If a man wants to be happy, let him be loving to a woman and *give her a chance* to love him and care for his comfort. If he desires an advance edition of Hades, just let him neglect a woman as the faces and forms of nine tenths of our women show they are neglected. Don't you talk to me about the women being scolds! Give them half a show, and they'll be *angels*. I am celebrated among my friends for my sweet temper and happy ways, but I am convinced that I could make it warm for any man who, under the promise to "love and protect" me, tried to make a slave and drudge of me. We women do not "scold" until we cease to love.

You have "concluded that I favour matrimony." Well, so I do, for the *men*. I regard the pure and lovable wife as the best safeguard to man's honour and purity; the comfortable and happy home as his rightful and natural resting place; and every loving environment that springs from such a tie one step nearer the heart of earth's dearest and best. That's for the *man*. And for every such a home some woman is the sacrificial flame

that feeds the altar. Do not think me a carper or a howler for woman's rights. I am not. But I sincerely believe that nine girls out of every ten who earnestly strive to make such a home as I imagine, half kill themselves at it. To lay on a girl's shoulders the management and planning of a house, then to have her cook, wash, bake, iron, scrub, make beds, sweep, and dust—and she must be bright, *oh, yes, always bright and cheerful!*—is enough to make a scold out of her. I take notice that my girl friends who have been engaged a year and those who have been married a year look vastly different, and it sets me to pondering on the difference between a man's *engaged* love and his *married* love.

So you have put me on the list of old maids? Of two evils I always choose the lesser. I have no intention of being an old maid, for I regard them as congealed specimens of selfishness and hate them accordingly! The men! "With all their faults, we love them still!" It's something to benefit those we love, and if people love each other dearly enough, there is no more trouble than life always brings, and besides that, *I* am going to marry the "exception to the rule!"

I presume a man who can say "good-bye" so calmly won't write an "enthusiastic little Methodist" a nice, great big letter; but she's looking for it, all the same. Don't forget and smoke. I haven't any cigars, but I *have* some nice sweet kisses that will fit right square on the place for a cigar, if there *isn't any cigar there!* Next time I see you, I won't tell you what I will do, but I am lots nicer now than I was out in Rome City.—Honest.

GENE.

On October 17, 1885, Mr. Porter wrote to her:

FRIEND GENE:

Yes, thank you, it was a very good letter, and to say that I enjoyed it only expresses myself in part. I was much amused over your report of Poppy Gray's actions, yet I am not surprised. Cousin Will should have known better than to mix you up with such stuff as he. If it were not that he's the Governor's son, he would be classed among the off-scourings of creation, and so far as my views or opinion of him are concerned, I would not alter them were he the President's son and his wealth an untold supply of gold. Yet, in spite of the surroundings, opportunities, and prestige of his father, there still remains conclusive evidence that his standing is below par. If there is anything serious concerning you about this matter, anything more than just ordinary gossip, please to advise me at once and I shall see to having matters righted.

So your Brother Irvin did write and give you his opinion of me. Well, I trust he will find no reason in the future to change his mind. And now that he has extended you an invitation to visit them for a little rest, I feel more than ever grateful to him.

Yes, when I see you again (do you think I'll know you?), I want you to look "sweet," yet to accomplish that I do not think it will require many new dresses.

I hope you have been bringing matters to a hearing and exerting your authority. I think you have too much spunk to let your family impose on you to any very great extent.

*Locals.*

1. My landlady informs me that my girl is a rich merchant's daughter. Can you tell me who she is?
2. A young lady of Decatur says my girl is not "a bit pretty." Can you tell me who she is?
3. Some one wants a nice, long letter soon. Can you tell me who *he* is?

Good-night.

CHAS. D. PORTER.

To which Gene replied:

October 21, 1885.

MR. PORTER:

Despite all the wind and rain your letter reached me on time Monday afternoon. Monday started out to be my blue day, cold and rainy, and worst of all, Ada commenced to pack up herself and Baby to go over to Mother Wilson's. The idea of bringing me here and then going off and leaving me alone for a week! It took some time for me to comprehend it—had to sorter filter through my brain.

So I was blue. Right here Sally came. Sally is my dressmaker. She is an old maid and an aunt of my friend Anna, and she makes dresses that fit "shoost like de baber on de vall." I had been explaining my trouble to Anna, and she just made Sally come a whole week before I expected her. I am going to hunt a drug store on Fairfield Avenue and steal a box of sweets for Anna. She surely helped out my blue week in a hurry.

Monday evening the rain just poured. The wind tore through our pines and howled: "No letter!" The

big drops of rain made eyes through the windows and sobbed: "No letter." And in the midst of it the door blew open and a bundle landed at my feet and somebody called, "Oh, how are you?" and it *was* a letter! I just tucked up in a big chair and felt blissful. So I've been just full of gladness ever since, and things are going nearer right.

I have a letter from Ada. She sends her regards to you and remarks to me privately that she's going to make a desperate effort to like you if *I* want her to. I told her she need not exercise herself. If she doesn't find you worth liking for your sweet self alone, she needn't come any Billisms on it. You are not a pill, and she doesn't have to take you. I can swallow you whole *by my lone self* very well.

Yes, I think Irvin has acted "reel purty." I don't see what more he could say, as little as he knows you. I was to say to you that you would please consider me "at home" at my brother's and extend a hearty welcome to you there in their behalf.

I think it's awful to have to give up all my beaux. Anna and I have been burning up a bushel or so of old love letters to-day—we found three proposals—had a regular picnic. We burned one poor soul's picture, and the card jumped up on the coals and nearly scared the wits out of us. We've still got another pile to go through.

### *Locals.*

1. Your landlady says your girl is a "rich merchant's daughter." Of course I can tell you who she is. She's *me*. Ain't I rich? I'll prove it. My father stored one hundred bushels of wheat in the ware-

house two years ago to await a rise in the market, and forgot it. The man broke up in Toledo grain deals and some time ago sent Father \$20.00 for his share of the wreck. After he had studied out what it was for, Father gave me the \$20.00 to buy a dress. Now if that is not the proceeding of a rich man, what is?

2. A Decatur lady says your girl is "not a bit pretty." *Who dares say I am not pretty?* Oh, mercy! what have I done? I mean, who dares say *your girl* is not pretty? If I were you, I'd go off in a corner and cry. I've a great notion to pass that girl by in cold contempt. I detest these girls who can see nothing in any one except themselves. I'll bet that was that red-faced old maid Dorwin, or else the little slick Chinese-eyed Miss Miller. At any rate, it was somebody with an onion-skin complexion, no hair, and half eyes, and bones to start a bone factory. That's the first time I ever heard *that in my life*, and *I am going right straight down to Decatur* to show them that I *am*—oh, dear! I mean "your girl——" Now! I'll not tell you what I mean. I wouldn't be "pretty," anyhow. I prefer being *positively handsome*.
3. Yes, I do know *who* wants a letter. I've had to sit straight up on a chair by the fire to write it, but you must *play* that it is "awful" nice.

Your headlong, impulsive, but always and ever, most loving,

GENIE.

In December she wrote to him:



## MY DARLING LOVER:

—You see, I not only think it, I just say it right out loud!

I can scarcely realise that another Christmas has come and is almost gone. Christmas, the anniversary of the day that gave to the world hope—thank God for the privilege of hoping, and think of the world without it!—the sacred, happy day of all the year. I see a picture of high walls, low wide windows, and the glowing log fireplace of a once lovely home. I can see the checkered shades of light and darkness dancing from ceiling to floor. I can see the happy faces of glowing, lovely childhood. I can faintly recall one pale, patient, dark-eyed face, so tender and loving to the children always. I can see one chubby, round little creature with rosy face, flying braids of dark brown hair, and gleaming, mischievous eyes. How well I remember her! Her white flannel dress and her eager laugh from here to there all in a minute! Oh! those old, glad, baby days! I almost long for them.

They never more can be,  
We cannot bring again the days  
Of our unshadowed glee.  
Yet joy and hope may brighten,  
And patient love may grow,  
As we listen in the starlight  
To the bells across the snow.

That little girl is all alone now, not wildly, eagerly happy, not either dull or sad; just a calm, sweet peace.

If the great elements of sympathy and love belong in our hearts, would to God they were not writ there so strongly, or that the calm which floweth like a river had

washed all passionate desire for that which blood makes so near and dear from us. Only to be perfectly happy without analysing cause and effect once more! How soon this world all seems to resolve itself into a struggle for self. The aim of each seems apparent. It is easy to be cynical at present, yet hard to be ungenerous. I have remembered you often to-day, and I am sure as thoughtfully and kindly as you could wish me to. Your gift is safely arrived on Christmas Eve. Its beauty is a continual reminder of the giver. Your gift is not a perfect one. "I have fault to find with thee." If you'd send me a white elephant on Christmas and never one little bit of a kiss, I would not care much. Whenever you send me a kiss *with* my Christmas gift, I'll love it, and not before. Anyway, I thank you many times for the lovely gift and send you this note in payment; interest shall accrue until I see you.

And the night shall be filled with music,  
And the cares that infest the day  
Shall fold their tents like the Arabs,  
And as silently steal away.

There's plenty of sleighing now. The bells are almost deafening to-day. It looks more like a carnival than Sabbath.

GENE.

Among my father's letters I find a half sheet of note-paper, yellowed with time and frayed at the edges, and on it is written in my mother's fine script:

"May Easter joy and peace be with you,  
And Easter blessings attend your way,  
And may my greeting and heart's best wishes  
Make gladder still this sacred day.

"And daylight done and night's stars shining,  
Sweet Easter memories in your heart enshrine.  
Yet if the greeting of any be dear unto you,  
I beg that the dearest may be—mine."

Under the stanzas she has written:

"(This is poeickry.)—A safe return home; a birthday remembrance; an Easter greeting—I plead my inability to express myself. Will not a leaf from the page of nature, writ by the hand of God, be the *purest, warmest* remembrance I can send you?

"GENE."

## *Chapter VIII*

"DEARER THAN ALL ELSE ON EARTH"

Wabash, Indiana,  
January 20, 1886.

MR. PORTER:

First I'll answer a little note I received this morning. Because it's the kind I like. . . . Makes me feel as if I had just stepped out of your arms. I am afraid that you do not very well know me, or you would not feel that you needed to test me. Cannot you believe, when I tell you that I love you, that I do? And cannot you understand all that means to me? I have always been reserved to the world, yet very tender hearted. A year and a half ago there came into my life a man that from the first frank and manly letter I received I believed in and trusted. "Little by little, line upon line, and precept upon precept" that first belief has grown. It has never doubted; never faltered. Personal contact only strengthened it, and when I read, with woman's keen insight in such matters, the fact that I was loved, I felt free to feel the boundless thrill of pleasure it gave me. In the morning of life came the dawn of love; came in my youth, strength, and ambition; flooded all the paths of life to come with the first love of a young, strong, passionate heart.

I cannot make you understand. If you could, if you would let yourself know, God knows you would prize what I have given you and be slow to pain me. Men

are not always loved for themselves alone as I love you. It is no wonder that I fear even to be a little bit happy lest the idol I worship tumble about my ears. Yet it is better that I learn the strength of my love for you now, that I learn the weight of my desires in your life now, than to suffer all that it would cost me to know that I had no influence over you later. I could far easier lose you at one great loss than to learn a bit at a time that I, who gave my love on promise of the dearest love of earth, got only what was left after the duties and works and worries of the world were done with you.

I admit that you are of a retiring disposition, but you are not “selfish”—I’ll slap whoever says so—and as for not being “capable of deep feeling,” the trouble is you are *afraid* of your feelings. There is one Supreme Omnipotent Being. We are taught that God is Love. Since I believe this, when a feeling of tenderness enters my breast I foster it, I pet it, I tend it, I give it light and air; and you—you carry it out in the alley and lay a brick on it to keep it out of the way of business, etc. If you’d let yourself, you’d be “capable” of all the love you hunger and thirst for. I *know* that you are “capable” of feeling so deep that your eyes can read the pages of God’s natural writing, and so vividly that I with you “see the huge banks of clouds that hang low over the high mountains, casting gentle shadows on their tawny sides.” You cannot write on the heart of another what you do not feel yourself. Some day if you find yourself alone and your friends ungrateful, blame it all, not to yourself as God made you, but to yourself as *you* trained the loving, giving, happy seeds He planted in your heart. I mean every word of this lecture, but will end it with a sweet kiss instead of “Amen.”

If you are going to believe that you are "cold-hearted" and have so "little to bestow" and that your "affection is not worthy of acceptance," I will not accept. I have a heart chuck full of love and running over. I have feet that run on "willing errands" and "hands that are light and helpful." Why should I give them to dry up, to ache, and to die in the light of such a nature as you paint yourself? No woman would love you long in such a case. Only as you love, only as you open your heart and let a woman creep *in, in, in*, clear down to the lowest depths—only as you love can you hope for love. That which you give must come back fourfold, must spring up into warm flowers of hope at your feet, must give you that which will make life all over new and glad and joyous. When you know that you have *all to give* that you desire in return, *that* some loving woman will lavish on you. Only then write me a letter and say that you are "longing for some one to love you."

If you do not send me a date right away when you are coming, I'll—well, I won't tell you what I'll do, but it will be awful. Oh, man!—here is a bribe. What do you like best to eat? Honest, tell me and I'll cook it for you—if I can. You cannot have any more kisses until you come for them.


Lovingly,  
GENE.

Evidently the letter Mr. Porter wrote her in reply to her last was of sufficient warmth to still all the questions in her heart, for she answered it on February 3, 1886, and began by dispensing with the formal "Mr. Porter" customarily used. She wrote instead:



DEAR LOVE:

I received your letter yesterday and was delighted with it. I think you really did not mean to find fault with me—in fact, you just wanted your Genie, didn't you?

How *glad* I am! I am going to be so good to you that you won't think there's anything *like* me. I am sure that so long as I am your little pet, Genie Girl will find the world as bright as love and tender care can make it. In your love I am *happy*; I know that *while* I am happy, I can make you so. Every day I think of something that I would love to do to comfort, help, or entertain you. I will do all I can to run a home properly; but my *Big Job* is you. You are *mine* (  This is for anybody

who says you are not) now; it is my joy to take especial care of you, and I'll pet you and love you and *spoil* you all I please.

I like your definition of love very much—what love means to a man I can only judge by appearance. To a woman it is a flame of divinity set burning in her soul. A first and only love is a thing so holy, so tender, that it fills me with awe. From whence came all these fountains of tenderness, these impulses of affection? I do not know; I do not understand. Of all the *world* I want only *you*; only loving words from *your* lips; only tender acts from *your* hands.

You say I am "dearer to you than all else on earth." Do you know what I have a great mind to do? Just believe it and be happy! If I could only sit at your feet to-night and draw life from the volumes of love in your dear eyes, how happy I would be! I want you for a change to have something for your *very own*; to have a

home—God's greatest blessing on earth—a beautiful, cosy place to live in, to love in, to come from the world's toil and care to the tender love of one who will look beautiful to you at least. I want life's beauty and its sunshine for you; I want its sweetly solemn gladness, too. I want Genie's face, just as bright and happy as life with you can make it, waiting in the window for your homecoming, and, by and by, there may be a little flower face waiting by my side for your welcome home, too. . . . To turn loose *all* the emotions of a woman's whole soul and light and life on *one* poor man! And the joke of it is that in my heart I know you really care the most, and if we never saw each other again, you would probably care the longest. But I've got to talk about it or die.

I have been studying the plan of the house you sent very closely, and I have a very nice arrangement all clear. I would not think of building an addition, Mr. Porter; the house is too big already. I always notice that the closer quarters you put young married folks in, the happier they are. I am sure I can dispense with an addition and still so arrange matters as to make a very pleasant home. I know I seem young to take care of a house, and I'll very probably be able to run it better in ten years than I am now; but if I do the best I can, and you help and encourage me, I know I'll succeed. We can have a long talk about everything when you come—only we both lose our faculties for talking in some strange manner.

You told me once that you were the "still waters that ran deep," but you must remember that still waters sometimes have an overflow; so just be careful. I think I have gotten a little rosier over this letter than any I've

ever written you. If you don't like this letter, when you come you cannot have a kiss for one solid hour for punishment!

To my dearest of lovers, Mr. Porter, good-night. I will have such loving kisses and caresses for you when you come.

Your darling baby,  
GENE.

The following letter is Gene's last to Charles before their marriage:

April 16, 1886,  
Friday Evening.

MR. PORTER:

I have been thinking of you almost every moment of the day. As near as I can make it out, this is the last letter that I can get to you just as Genie. And, darling, my heart is very full. I would love to write you the very best letter I ever could, but somehow words seem to fail me. I have only a few minutes to write, and I never was much more completely worn out. But I am very happy to-night. I could wish that there were some deep, meaning words, some overflowing current, by which I could make bud and bloom on the white page the scarlet red roses of happiness to-night.

Somehow, as the time grows shorter and I contemplate my own insignificance, I get all mixed up and doubt my own capabilities to make everything as I should desire it. But, thank God, I never doubt you! And, oh, I am so glad that the time for those cruel old good-byes is over, that now I won't have to send my blessed dear old boy out into the cold, or rainy, nights alone. Now I can do everything I desire to for you, and if I cannot

make *you* happy, I can make *myself* happy trying to. I am just glad it's so near over. I don't feel as if I were losing my lover, but just getting him for my very own, nearer and dearer and sweeter than ever.

Darling, I owe you an apology. I now remember that you have asked me two or three times if the number of your invitations was agreeable to me and my friends. And just through the rush and worry, I have forgotten to answer you. It is perfectly agreeable and will fit the house "shoost like de baber on de vall." Bring forty if you want to; it will be all right with us. I wish to heaven I was at home and could treat your friends like white. Cannot you explain to them that I live "round" among my relations and haven't any home? Then maybe they won't expect so awfully much less than they will get more.

I am too tired to write. This has been the very hardest week of my life. The work is hard enough, and the worry killing. *Oh*, I'll be glad when I can get behind my lover and defy them! All my life since last August has been so different from all former experience that I scarcely know myself. I have just a thousand things I want to say, but cannot remember them in my flurry. *Oh*, how I need you to-night! But I'll try to be brave a few days longer, and then I verily believe I'll have to nestle close in those dear arms that have always seemed open for me, and take a little snub. I'll try not to cry my head off.

I do hope my wedding present has come. I want it because I shall love it; and because I want to cut a *real* swell among my friends with it. (Don't mention it.)

It doesn't seem as if I could wait until Tuesday to see you, but I suppose I must. I don't know when Irvin

will be down—maybe to-morrow, but I hope not; it makes so much work to have company right through house-cleaning.

I got my—our—box off to-day. The bedding is lovely. I don't suppose it will get there much before *I* do, so that I won't give any instructions concerning it. If you are there Monday and it has come, just lift the top lid off and fluff out the bedding a little. Don't you *dare* touch below the sheet under it. There is some private property there. *It* isn't *ours*. It's *mine*. I hate to have my fine comforts mashed so. Guess it will be all right, though.

My dear, I received your note from Decatur to-day and was very glad for it. Now, pet, you *are* a daisy! The idea of your getting into my dishes to unpack them. I thought I said—but you don't seem to mind—I did not *want* you in my dishes. You can't fix them. I'll have to do it all over. Talk about my sitting on the sofa! I'll put on my little blue dress—one you've never seen—and just make things *fly*.

I am disgusted to be obliged to close before I have said a word I want to, but I must if you get anything. Be sure to write me Sunday, and don't dare miss the train Tuesday, or you'll find me sick in bed.

UNCLE DORWIN:

Please bring me a 'nana, and I will give you a tiss and a love.

LITTLE HAZEL.

Here is a letter from Hazel. She talks of you incessantly. She wants you to come to-day. She got down on the steps and put up her little hands and prayed for you to come and bring her bananas! She talks of you all the time—how the train will come; how after a while you'll knock and say, “Where is Hazel?” And then she'll



get a banana. I know your burdens are great; but if you forget her banana, the rod will fall. You can call on her Auntie Gene for your reward.

Don't forget *my* flowers.

To my dearest of lovers, my darling Mr. Porter, forever good-bye, and for my dearest of —— (I cannot say it yet) I will have, oh, such loving, round arms, and, oh, such hundreds of loving kisses and caresses. Come soon to your darling

BABY GENE.

Mr. Porter's reply to her last letter before their marriage follows:

Sunday,

April 18, 1886.

MY DEAR GENE:

So my little girl *must* have one more letter from her lover. Thought I was through until your darling little missive of Friday reached me. My poor little Gipsy Genie is all "broke up" over her work and worry. Well, my dear, I feel *very* sorry for you. You must be brave just a little longer and then—it's to be hoped—all will be over. I mean the suspense, not the sweet and happy time in store for us in the future. *I* do not doubt your "capabilities." You are going to be right at home, because *I* am going to help you and there will be no necessity for any rush. We will have loads of places in the old house to rest, and the most pleasing part of it is that Genie can say, "*I* have a home and can manage it just to suit myself," and in it she can "reign supreme."

My dear, your apology was unnecessary. I understood the situation and knew that your oversight was unwanton. Besides, in the event that the number was not



agreeable, you would not have forgotten it. Do not worry about my friends; I do not in the least fear but that they will be *perfectly* satisfied and pleased; and if they are *not*, I can very soon acquaint them with “the terms.” I can manage my little boat in defiance of them all, if I so choose. Pecuniarily, I am under no obligations to any of them.

Yes, Genie Baby, you may nestle in my arms and have a *little* cry if you want to. Then I *know* that you will feel better after I kiss away the tears.

I will not go to Decatur again, dear, until we reach there together; so that your box will be unopened. Now, *what* have I done? Really, dear, I thought you said—and I am *sure* yet that you did—“Take my dishes out and put them in my cupboard.” And here I had thought I was obeying you like a nice little boy. At all events, I did not want Baby mussing over a pile of dirty straw unpacking dishes. Besides, I wanted to get all the dirt together and carried away from the house. Of course, they (the dishes) are not arranged: only *thrown* inside for Genie to fix them up nice. *But* please remember, my Gipsy, we are not going to have any “cyclone.” You are not going to work *half* so hard as you have been doing for the past few months. There will be ample time, and you must stretch the unpacking and straightening out, so that you will have employment and prevent you from getting lonesome.

I hope that you are resting to-day, Gene, and that my letter you *should* have will help you. Tell Hazel that I have a sweet kiss for her, and bananas, for writing me that nice little letter. I shall not forget your flowers. Will probably go to Wayne on Monday afternoon so that I will have time to look after that and some

other matters before my departure for Wabash Tuesday Eve. If I should get through in time, I may go in the afternoon, and in that event, will either telegraph you or send you a note after my arrival. Wish I could say as sweet a good-bye as you did, but I cannot. Good-bye, my love, sweet little Baby Gene, and—for the “hundreds of loving kisses and caresses” I’m to have you shall have many returns.

CHAS.

## Chapter IX

"MOTHER"

*Mr. Mark Stratton  
requests your presence at the marriage of  
his daughter,  
Wednesday evening, April twenty-first,  
at nine o'clock,  
One Hundred and Twelve Hill St.,  
Wabash, Ind.  
1886*

In 1886 it was not customary to put the names of the two parties on the invitations, so two calling cards were enclosed:

*Gene Stratton*

*Charles D. Porter*

They were married at Ada's house in Wabash, and the wedding party was very gay. It included, aside from both families, Fanny Dorwin and the other three members of the Rome City quartette, whom Gene had met by this time and learned to know.

The bride was very lovely. In those days it was not considered essential for a bride to be gowned in white, and Gene wore pink silk combined with heavy pink taffeta brocaded in sprays of tiny pink rosebuds with soft green leaves. This brocaded material formed the panel front of the gown, the panniers on the sides, and the puffs on the shoulders of the long sleeves. The frock was built

over a cream-coloured underdress and was trimmed with filmy lace. The overskirt at the back was of the plain pink silk, full at the waist, and hanging straight to the bend of the knees, where it was caught in several places and gracefully draped. With the toilette went white gloves, white hose and slippers (white slippers being most unusual at that time). Gene wore no veil, as they were not then used, even in church weddings, but I still have the white satin fan that she carried, with its carved ivory sticks, hand-painted in tiny rosebuds and forget-me-nots, its border about four inches deep of white marabou.

Ada says:

"I recall so well her going to Fort Wayne to buy her wedding outfit. Father took her to the train, and she went up to Irvin's. She was gone a few days and returned with a marvellous big new trunk with all her finery in it. In her trousseau was a most beautiful morning gown of salmon pink cashmere, silk lined, made with a panel front from chin to feet, lace edged, the back and sides close fitting, with a graceful flare from the waist to the bottom. It was a seductive style for her, with her colouring and abundant coils of brown hair.

"Her going away dress was made of what was then called 'French Ladies' Cloth'; the colour Gobelin blue or peacock blue—a blue with a tinge of golden-green, a very lovely shade. The dress was made with a tight-fitting basque, an overskirt, and plain dress skirt. The trimming was black passementerie silk ornamental designs combined with jet beads. The wrap, of the same material and trimming, was neither a cape nor a dolman, but had the suggestion of both, and was dignified by the

name of ‘mantle.’ It was shaped a bit in the back with long fronts that could be crossed and draped over and under each arm: a very graceful arrangement. The day was April’s fairest, and so warm a wrap was scarcely needed.

“Gene’s hat was of velvet matching the dress in colour, and was trimmed with a large black ostrich plume. In those days, an ostrich plume was one long, single rib, twelve to eighteen inches long, very heavily curled. The one Gene wore was a beautiful, gracefully waving plume which her style and figure could so well carry.

“With her travelling dress Gene wore black gloves and high black shoes, her dress just sweeping the ground. She was very much a queen in her youth, beauty, pride, and carriage.”

Before the ceremony one of the boys had threatened that he would be the first to kiss the bride—even before the groom. Just as the minister finished his prayer and said “Amen!” Gene lifted her fan and behind it her husband gave her a smacking kiss. The minister was so amazed at this performance that he forgot to present them formally to the company, as was customary in those days, and the boy, who was edging up to make good his threat, was so defeated that there was a general laugh, and the embarrassing moment before congratulations was avoided. The Fort Wayne and Decatur guests left with the bride and groom, who went directly to Decatur in accordance with Gene’s wishes to go straight to her own home. The old Porter homestead had been re-furnished and redecorated to receive the bride.

Although Mr. Porter’s business was in Geneva, and it was necessary for him to come back and forth every

day on the train, he thought his bride would be happier in Decatur; for Geneva was a very small, undesirable town, with no social life whatever. Gene made the old homestead attractive and lovely, and she felt that she was very lucky to have such a kind, considerate husband, who was always wanting to give her things for herself and for the house. I still treasure the pin which he gave her on their first wedding anniversary—an oblong of black onyx with a little half circle of pearls like a rainbow running across it. When one of her friends suggested that this pin was a little old for her, she replied: "Oh, no! Just think what a nice old lady I'll make, with a pretty lace collar fastened with this pin, sitting in the corner with my knitting."

Sometimes, when Mr. Porter missed his train and she was alone for the evening, she spent the night with Fanny Dorwin, who even now recalls how interested Gene was in the flocks of blackbirds that were always on their lawn—the old Dorwin homestead was a huge place with numerous evergreen trees. Gene told Miss Dorwin of the time when, as a little girl, she had made a suit of clothes for Hezekiah, her pet blue jay.

She wrote Mr. Porter daily letters, filled with news of her progress in home-making. One of the first follows:

10 o'clock Wednesday,  
May 11th, 1886.

MY DARLING OLD BOY:

I have been up and just slaying the work for four hours now, so I have earned a little rest that I will improve by writing to you. Our old home does begin to look cosy and nice as I clean it. I will have it all pretty and a nice tea by Saturday night for your homecoming.



I am so well that I want to blow about it. I am jubilant, I feel so splendid! I have all the peace of the beautiful morning in my heart—stimulated by the fact that I am going to have “greens” for dinner! Auntie said Monday that they had greens, and I said: “And never asked *me* up?”

She said: “Why, that’s too bad; we had such lots!”

“And never brought me any!” I said teasingly. And last night here that peaceful old soul came lugging a big basket of dock! How bright the world is when people are good to you! She said to boil them in salt water and put butter on them—but that didn’t strike me. For the first time since she’s stayed with me I *forgot* to ask her to stay for dinner. Wasn’t that mean? Well, I was just dead for those greens, and I didn’t want them cooked that way. As soon as she was gone I cut some dandelion and a lot of stuff from my bed, and what a feast of grass and grease I will have!

Your garden looks like dark despair. The potatoes are coming finely, though the last you planted are not up yet. Next week I will get it hoed. The yard justifies the fun everybody pokes at it, but I guess if I had my little Jersey here, she’d soon crop it.

My dear, since you have praised me for being brave over this hard separation, I have been all “broke up.” I have not lived these awful days all at once: just a day at a time, and hoped every day would be the last one. Sometimes I have felt I could not be separated from you a minute longer. I am just hungry for you. But don’t get worried and come when you cannot; I will be brave again soon. I do not know why I miss you so today. I guess the grand old secret is at the bottom of it: “*I love you so!*”

I've got to stop and "bile" my greens!

*Later.*

This has been a very lovely day and a very busy one. I did not get so much done on our house either. It is now dark, and as soon as I finish my love letter I must go to bed. That means up to Uncle Doc's. *Of course* I've had callers to-day. One little lady who said you invited her to your wedding seemed to be quite bashful about mentioning you. Guess she must have been "smit," too.

It seems to me that I'd give the world if I could come through space and put my arms around your neck and give you one dear old loving.

As ever your wife,  
GENIE.

Father Stratton, who continued to live with Mrs. Wilson in Wabash until his death, January 10, 1890, missed Gene greatly after her marriage and wrote her often. One of his letters follows:

Wabash County, Indiana,  
June 5, 1886.

DEAR DAUGHTER GENEVA:

On this Tuesday afternoon I have concluded to pencil you a few lines after saying that we are all well except for a light headache which has followed me for some-time. I am in receipt of your grand letter of the 1st instant. Sorry to hear of your sickness. Glad it is no worse. Hope it will be better soon.

Our garden looks well now—peas in bloom, potatoes showing the blossom buds, lettuce in abundance, corn knee high, other things in preparation.

We have just passed Decoration Day—one of the best the people of Wabash ever had. To begin with, on Sunday evening Brother Mahin preached the Memorial discourse and captivated those who heard. This was a Union meeting in the Presbyterian Church; houseful present. On yesterday the services were held in the Falls Avenue Cemetery. Marshal of the Day, Captain Stone; President, Alvah Taylor; Orator, Mr. Tomlinson; Second speech by Mr. Parmenter. Both did well. Acres of ground covered with people, horses, and bug-gies.

With you I am sorry Irvins are going so far away, but, as you say, maybe they can do better there than here. I hope so. At least Fort Wayne will be a lonesome place for us with them gone. Our family seems to be drifting wide apart. No telling where it will end, but I think the Pacific Ocean will be a barrier they will hardly pass in this generation.

I was much pleased with your letter. Glad you are so brave to stay alone when necessary. It is an old thing with me; yet since I have got used to it, I do not mind it for a time, but would shrink with horror from it if it was all the time. Boarding around is not funny for me. It is terribly quiet of nights; no one to break your rest. You cannot imagine how lonesome it seems at times when you are absent; but “what can’t be cured must be endured” is the old adage, and there is wisdom in it, too.

I am glad you are so happy. Do not forget the old motto: “To be happy is to be good,” and as love is the foundation of all happiness, while you love your husband, home, and your neighbours, and especially your God, you will be happy.

I think I will try to come up to your place in a few weeks. Mr. Payne reported his call on you and seemed to be much pleased with your situation. Yes, highly flattered.

Ada sends her love to you and Mr. Porter with mine.

As ever yours,  
MARK STRATTON.

The following fall Irvin Stratton and his family moved West, and there was some talk of Mr. Porter's selling the drug store and going to live on a homestead, such glowing reports of boom days came out of Kansas. Gene was very enthusiastic about the proposed move, and wrote the following letter when she was expecting her brother and his family for their final visit with her before their Western exodus:

MY DEAR BOY:

"It never rains but it pours!" I received four letters yesterday, and three of them set a date for "company," and of course they *conflict*! Now we are in a mess. I've gone to work. "WORK."

I wrote Anna to wait till next Tuesday. I wrote Irvins to come Saturday afternoon as they desired (they start a week from Tuesday, and it is their only chance. I long to see them in my own home, and we owe them a blow-out anyhow—at least, *you* do). If you've written to Doc's, I'll send them a line and explain. I was surprised to hear from Anna that she could come. She desired me to meet her to-morrow, but I just can't. It would be no fun for me, none at all for Irvins, and very little for Anna to have them all here at once. In fact, it wouldn't do at all.

I've thought until I nearly split my head. I can see

but one way for us and that is to go to Dakota and take a claim (two, if we can; one, anyhow) and live *out* a year or two. It won't hurt us, and then, if you have the drug fever, we'll go to town and get you a store. What would it cost to fix us a claim so that we could live a year or two on it, and have we got the money? “Show me the money!”

Uncle Thomas says it is the very place for you and vows he's going. I mean to write to a dear friend of mine, Mrs. Kimmel, who went there for her health and lives on a claim near Blunt, to-morrow, and see how they are doing and what she thinks. She is a finely educated woman, and her opinion on all points is good. Now, don't laugh at my business, because I can be business if I *try*, and I just see that, if we get out of here, *I've* got to do it! So no snickering!

Be sure to come Saturday. Yours, with all my love and a whole hundred kisses,

GENE.

But this dream never materialised, and we find Gene writing later, in December, 1886, quite contentedly of home affairs again:

Friday.

MY DARLING BOY:

Isn't this a lovely snowstorm? I am so pleased over it—I love a big white snow better than anything else in nature, and, by the way, the old poem, “The Beautiful Snow,” though hackneyed, is one of the finest poems in the English language.

I got wild and went out into this snow and walked about two miles. It seemed to me that I could not stand it in the house another minute; so I went out. I got wet

and cold; but I enjoyed it very much. Now I've got home and combed my hair and put on my best wrapper and my pretty pin and feel a thousand times better, thanks to the snowstorm.

But this is too snowy a day to talk so much snow: it makes me want to go coasting. If this continues to-night the boys can break and pack the hill, and we can have loads of fun sliding by the first of the week. I've got my old sled here, and it's a bully one, too.

Sally has promised to send my dress home to-night. It fits as only Sally can fit me. She says I have lost a good deal of flesh and that my form is lovely now—just round and plump enough.

I do hope I will soon get to feeling better so that I can get out some. I am glad you are so brave, and I wish to the Lord I was, too. But somehow the prospect of life here as I have had it before with this added to my days alone is a little more than I know how to bear. Don't you dare send me another "be brave and patient" letter, or I'll die in a fit!

I send you love and kisses and myself into the bargain.

As ever your  
GENIE.

But the lonely winter months passed finally, and with summer came fresh courage, so that on July 5, 1887, Gene wrote:

MY BELOVED HUSBAND:

I received your loving little note this morning and it has made me happy all day. This great human love, dear, that has so completely bound me to you rejoices in the loving words you send.

Yes, I am still happy—happier than I have ever been



in my life before. It somehow came all at once, this great joy, and it has not calmed yet. What a great surpassing thing is this mother love that is creeping softly over me. I never could have imagined that I should stay here through the long days alone, in the heat, and yet bear it all with as sweet a smile as I ever had for my lover, for the sake of this little new life, and for the yet dearer sake of him whom I have so lovingly promised to comfort and make happy.

Baby does not like me to write to you a bit. It either makes him mad to be doubled up, or else he's mad that you never mentioned him in your last letter. The days are getting to seem awfully long, and it's almost more than I can bear to know that you are not coming when evening comes.

I think Sonny is well. He is beginning to put in from ten to fifteen minutes a day now at some sort of a performance—something like skinning the cat; he skins about seventeen cats at one session. I feel greatly encouraged over him, for he surely must be well and strong. You'll have to have a little celebration for your babies when you get home, but no fireworks; just some ice cream.

I am looking for the little brahma chickens to hatch now every minute. My poppies are in bloom and are the loveliest things imaginable. They are a great comfort to me.

I expect a letter from you this afternoon, and then I will write again unless Baby is performing on the pole until I cannot write.

Very lovingly,  
YOUR WIFE.

Thus, after two years in Decatur, Gene's name was changed for the last time and she became "Mother," for a rosy, fat, baby girl arrived, who gave her a new interest in life and kept her busy, as is the way of babies. They named the baby Jeannette after Mr. Porter's sister, of whom he was very fond.

One summer, when the baby was almost two years old, Father Stratton visited Gene in Decatur. One day she was scolding the little one for some small misbehaviour when Father Stratton, out of his deep wisdom acquired in the rearing of his own twelve children, gave her some advice which it would be well for all mothers to remember.

"Don't *see* too much," he said to her. "Only pay attention to the big things that will have some definite bearing on her later life, and let the little things pass unnoticed. Children forget them in a few days, anyway."

When the baby was about two years old, Gene decided that the daily trips back and forth to Geneva were too difficult for Mr. Porter, and as conditions had improved somewhat in Geneva, she made up her mind to join her husband there. He reluctantly consented, but only on condition that if she were not contented she should go back to Decatur.

They moved into a little yellow house, set in the corner of a lot as large as half a modern city block. This lot contained an orchard with apple trees and peach and pear trees. There was a little chicken house and yard in the back where they kept a few chickens; and all around the lot ran a high fence. Back of this lot was a barn where Mr. Porter kept a horse and buggy, and in the loft were little houses for the many pigeons which were kept partly for pets and partly for food.

Mother, remembering how healthful and sturdy she had always been from her outdoor life when a youngster, kept her own little girl out in the yard all the time. There she had a sand pile, a sliding-board, a “teeter-totter,” and a swing, all of which were made by the proud and indulgent young father.

Shortly after the move to Geneva Mother wrote to Cosette Stratton, a niece of whom she was very fond and who was then attending a young ladies’ seminary:

MY BLESSED INFANT:

I received your effusion with joy. I have thought of you almost daily, but this has been a busy year for me. None of us has been too well, and, oh, dear me! the housekeeper couldn’t keep house; the hired girl stole the meat; and I couldn’t build my big house, and so I am still “in the soup.” It must be vegetable soup, for it’s awfully thick. This thing of trying to put the furniture that filled a barn into a mouse nest is trying. I use the upstairs for one grand packing room, and still I fall down over cots and curtains and “stuff.” Yesterday “Moses” asked if he couldn’t put a curiosity case in the sitting room: I looked at it, and then at him, and almost fainted.

I will tell you about Father when you come. I cannot write of it easily. He was my father and mother both for years, and I loved him above everything till my marriage—and even that isn’t anything like the love you give your father, because it doesn’t affect that any.

All the same, I am married; yes, married very muchly, and I have a beautiful little daughter; but I’m not any older, and I’ve got just as much fun in me as ever.

My dear, about your dress. You heedless chicken!

What can *I* tell you? You don't tell me if you want it for day or evening, for what date in the season, or what you are to *do* in it. So I can't advise. Besides, do you realise that I live in a little "yeller" house in Adams County mud, and get my social pleasures in summer tours—Decatur, Wayne, and Wabash—and I haven't been any place since fall, when I wrote you all I knew.

I am going to Wayne in a few days to get our spring turn-outs, and may hear or see something there. We are going home to spend May, and I don't know where we will go this summer. If you can't wait to write again, I would advise, at a venture, that you get a *useful* dress, one that can be used all summer.

Light and airy,  
Like a fairy.

My idea of a dress for a sweet young schoolgirl is snow white, some muslin or Indian linen. Mull is lovely, with lace, and cameo or lavender ribbons. Mohair and alpaca are too womanly, too stiff, too hot; there is not much use for them in a small town (as I know by bitter experience), they soil quickly, and are not *the thing*, anyhow. Wealth may buy those things, Cosie, but hark ye! *it can't make them appropriate*. If I were worth untold millions, and robing *my* daughter, at your age, for such an occasion, I should get fine mull and lace. You can do it at half the cost, and look ten times "softer and sweeter." I detest these stiff, flat stuff dresses for anything except street or travelling. I like the loveliest tea and house dresses, and dinner and evening dresses—a mass of lace and ribbon. Bright, soft, sweet; making woman brighter and sweeter by their use.

Whatever you do, Cosie, be a feminine woman. *Love*

to be a woman, since you're born one and can't help yourself. I think a beautiful girl who is glad she *is* a woman, glad for her girlhood, glad for the genuine, manly passion she will some day rouse, glad to be a wife and found a bright, attractive home and get her crown from the touch of baby hands, glad to be bright and lovely and sweet, to robe herself to *please*, and *forget* herself to *comfort*—well, there is something in such a life for woman that makes me stare at these strong-minded, bossy, cross, fussy, frowsy, woman's rights, political, stump-speaking women in amazement. Truth to tell, I loathe them. They despise low necks because their own necks are scrawny; they despise bare arms because theirs are pimply; they rail at powder because a coat of white lead would not cover their blotches; they rave at men because no man would have them—or got sick of them if they did. There's always a motive for every act and the fiddler to pay at the end of the dance. If you want to be lovely and loved, be sweet and bright and brave and tender; be as beautiful as God made you, for you have a right to; cultivate every grace and charm you have, and somewhere your reward is waiting for you. *Lastly*, get you a soft, fluffy, lacy dress that will be pretty for all summer afterward; and come and see your best friend after your parents.

I wish to goodness I was where I could slip you some of my laces and jewels for Commencement. If you could only have my pink opal necklace and bracelet for your white suit, and some of my lovely fans! I've got such beauties, and I never use them here. But you'll do just as well without them, and when you are fat and forty (thank goodness, it's a long time yet for us!) you'll need such things to help out. Just now your own sweet



face will be sweeter the more simply you dress, and a "ribbon and a rose your beauty's best adornment."

You are right, my dear, to be independent; but don't be aggressively so, because it isn't pretty, and your face won't amount to a red cent if you aren't capable of carrying yourself in a manner to win and keep friends.

I've been turning my artistic talent on my sweet sister Ada—a large oil painting, a bolting cloth banner, and a small oil study in the "broad" method—first I ever tried; took a long-handled brush and placed the study three feet away and threw the paint at it. I could hardly let it be, when I was near it; but ten or fifteen feet *away* it is lovely. You can see the slime on the lily leaves and their shadows on the pitcher. I am putting spare time on a slumber robe and pillow, trying to see how much work I can put on them. Is it under-glaze china decoration you are doing? If it is, get a box large enough for sideboard use and decorate "just lovely" for me, and I'll give you my blue velvet suit for it. I am not well, and it is too heavy for me. With a little alteration it would make a girl of about your size a beautiful fall and winter suit. I haven't used it a dozen times, I know. I must have sent you a sample of it.

Acres of love, and write soon.

GENE.

Pe Ess. I wish an old married lady of about twenty-five years of age and about my style could slip into a female "semblinary" with a big box of goodies and ribbons, when the cat's away and the mice are playing. There'd be one spree more on record sure.



## *Chapter X*

### HER ESTIMATE OF WALT WHITMAN

MRS. PORTER loved her home. She kept her house clean and served three deliciously cooked meals each day. She trained her baby and made all of her clothes until she was twelve years old. There were few people in the little town whom she found interesting, and although her time was well taken up with duties at home, they never entirely filled her whole heart and brain. In trying to occupy her spare time, she continued violin lessons from a teacher who came to the little town once a week from Richmond, Indiana, and she joined a class in embroidery and china painting, and was made a member of the village literary club. During this time she wrote the following paper which she read at a meeting of the club:

#### "WALT WHITMAN

"Before beginning the meat of this paper, I wish to say that I have approached my wonderful subject with fear and trembling. It has not been a case of 'fools rushing in where angels fear to tread,' but slowly, steadily, with depth of emotion painful at times, I have given every available moment for three weeks to my subject and his book.

"What I have to say of my own inspiration is open to your fullest criticism. When I quote Tennyson, Emerson, Thoreau, Ruskin, Dr. Johnston, D. G. Rossetti, and

Conway, I consider myself as giving incontrovertible proofs of the statements I make. Everything I say I hedge about with quotations from these masters of the Nineteenth Century, headed by Tennyson, Master of all, who tenderly and wisely alludes to the stock from which Whitman sprung; the Dutch and English sturdiness that gave his superb physical background; the sacred, potent mother light that flashed peace and content into all moods and seasons, the pauseless sea from whose moods and impulses he caught the pulse of his rhythm and song.

"His family moved to Brooklyn when he was in frocks, and in the common schools of that city he got what might be termed all the *formal* education he ever had. At sixteen we find him teaching country schools and boarding round. Then he returned to New York, working as a printer and taking, as he expressed it, an occasional shy at poetry. In '48 and '49, after nine years' experience and fun in New York, to quote the author, he and a brother made a tour of every Western state, tramping and working for expenses.

"He says: 'We went through all the middle states and down the Ohio and Mississippi, over the West and back by the Missouri, Great Lakes and Niagara, through Canada, and down the Hudson to New York again. A small matter to write, but what a thing to do! Days of travel, by foot and boat, over mountain and valley, by lake and river, from ice to tropics, from East to West, from North to South, in constant contact with every grade and class of people.'

"He settled in New York as an architect, and speedily came to fame and fortune. He quit through sheer distaste for the grind of business and money getting and began on his book, *Leaves of Grass*. In December of

'62 he went South to nurse a wounded brother and remained to the close of the war, nursing any sick or wounded human being, horse, dog, or mule, that fell in his way. There was even a joke about him wanting to plaster and bind up broken cart wheels of the commissary department for fear the spokes had 'souls' and might be in pain. From '65 to '71 he clerked in a government department in Washington and there suffered a severe stroke of paralysis occasioned by his exposure in army experiences. He started back to Long Island, which he always considered home, and breaking down on the way, lay a long time in Philadelphia and was from there removed to Camden, New Jersey, where he so long waited strength to continue his journey that he became attached to the place and purchased a small, one-story house, which he occupied with a body servant and cook until his death.

"His house resembled a deserted ship cabin: a place in which to eat, sleep and write—but not to live; the world was his home. His house had bare floors, walls, and rooms, was all cheap, poor, and common. The tapestries he loved were curtains of waving green; the carpet his feet trod with satisfaction was his beautiful *Leaves of Grass*, the handkerchief of the Lord, dropped to earth as a remembrance, worked with His initials marking it—Whose? The walls he loved, the blue dome of heaven, lit by the glorious golden sun fire or sparkling and darkling with night stars. His pictures were stretches of sea and land, human movement and faces, every littlest part or particle of earth a picture of interest to his masterly mind.

"In this house, surrounded by hosts of earth's greatest men, he passed the last days of his life, serene, content,

eagerly happy when his work on earth was done. Hear him asking, 'Do you fear death? I say it is better far than any one supposes, and luckier.' The philosophy of most men does not deal with the good luck of dying. Whitman died serene in having accomplished the task he set himself. That his book was little known and a financial failure never troubled him at all. He had his 'message,' as he termed it, on record, endorsed by earth's greatest minds; he could wait, and wait happily, and in serene content, for the fame he knew would come. For the fortune he cared not at all. Verily, he was not 'demented with the mania of owning things.'

"In order to understand his book it is necessary to keep in mind his characteristics and his life history. This, as to where he spent his years, and the principal things—outside his book—he did. Now as to his characteristics and what he thought; then on to the impulse of his book, which is plain enough, read by the light of his life history.

"In his prime he stood six feet four and weighed two hundred pounds. Physically, morally, spiritually, he was large and free. His beautiful head had a noble weight, ease, and repose. He had never known an illness and was of superb stature and symmetry without a flaw. He would be big and free and strong. His always open shirt front disclosed a neck and chest of Godlike symmetry and white, glistening flesh. His hands and arms were large and well formed. Constructively he answered to an ideal standard, and happy was the artist or sculptor who was permitted to copy his noble proportions. His most intimate friend, Horace L. Traubel, used to take people to meet him and then compare their expressions when they left, and he puts on record that, after taking

hundreds in the course of ten to fifteen years, not one ever left him without having felt the force of his magnetism and without being haunted by him for days afterward.

"He liked to stretch his body on the greensward in the sun with the winds of heaven to fan him, and to be of the earth, earthy. He simply would not be confined; the world was his stage; he would travel it. His brain should scale mountain and peak; all nature and all nations were his.

"He was the most democratic man that ever lived; his life stands to prove it. Of Nature in her varying moods he feasted and feasted and was never filled. Hear him saying:

"I think I could turn and live with animals,  
 They are so placid and self-contained.  
 I stand and look at them, and long and long.  
 They do not sweat and whine about their condition;  
 They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins;  
 They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God;  
 Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of  
     owning things;  
 Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived a thousand  
     years ago;  
 Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

It has been truly said that his book, *Leaves of Grass*, and the Declaration of Independence were the only strictly democratic things in America. Look to his life; see him boarding round, meeting all sorts; see him travel America from shore to shore, consorting with whoever came in his way. Look at the equanimity of mind with which he goes through great cities, accepting the want, squalor, hunger, prostitution equally with the wealth, beauty, and refinement. See him during the war absolutely refusing



to have party or politics, giving as his reason for nursing that he was the wellest man alive, therefore fittest to nurse the ill, absolutely refusing to be of North or South, going where he listed, caring for whoever needed him, walking nearer in the footsteps of Jesus on earth than any other man has ever trod. Do I startle you? Listen. When a New York architect on the way to fame and fortune, he deliberately quit because he was 'getting rich,' and he was not possessed with the 'mania of owning things.' He wanted one room, a bare floor, bed and bread, God and Nature, and his fellow men—not before or after him—but beside him, shoulder to shoulder, heart to heart, hand in hand, poverty, colour, sin, wealth, beauty, all of no matter, perfectly indifferent to any and everything, only recognising a human body, which meant a human soul one and inseparable now and forever. He was the greatest leveller this world has ever known.

"We are all willing to level, like Dr. Johnston's character, Mr. McCauly, a lord down to our level and leave servants and poor where they are. Whitman had a leveller. It began on the face of the earth and ended at the throne of God. No one was above, no one beneath, all an universal brotherhood; and he struck and struck, and every blow he landed at the foot of the Throne. We see him aiding runaway Negroes. 'What,' he says, 'are you a slave, beaten and hungry, and with a beautiful, immortal soul in your body?' And does he give him his crusts and attic? Nay, not so. Most did. Whitman says: 'Sit at my table, eat my food, sleep in my bed, take my clothing. You are my brother.'

"We find him in dens of sin as much, more, than in mansions, consorting with sailors, omnibus drivers, railroad workers, alive with motion and force. We find him



one morning at the gate of the New York morgue as the driver of the dead wagon passes out with a cheap pine box alone.

“‘What have you there?’ says Whitman.

“‘A dead prostitute,’ says the driver, ‘bound for the Potters’ Field.’

“‘And has she no friends? Is there a single dead body on earth with no one to mourn or do reverence?’

“‘There is none,’ said the driver.

“‘Stay! I will go with you,’ said the Poet. There-upon such a sight as the world never witnessed follows. With uncovered head and reverential face, through the long hot miles of city pavement, follows the body of the dead prostitute, whose face he never saw, the living Poet, that she in the form of his mother, whose sins, whether through passion or sufferance, might not shut her out from even one to do her honour. Christ on earth would have done such a thing; no other man ever did or would save this greatest Democrat of the ages. There was no better, or worse, among men for him: all were good. Behind the accidental man, the ignorant or educated, the vicious or virtuous, rude or polished, he saw always the eternal and awful soul. He never was struck, as were Shakespeare and Milton, by the sublime achievements of the body; to him soul and body were one glorious whole. He found just as much to interest him in a deck hand or bus driver as he did in a celebrity of two continents who crossed the ocean to see him.

“Now as to *Leaves of Grass*. What sort of book could we expect from a man like this? Could this great soul that roamed mountain and sea, that embraced all men and all Nature, that could not follow business lines or wear ordinary clothes, express itself as common men?

Could he be tied down to grind out yards of feet, meter, and rhythm for '3 ps. a line'? Imagine it! One could as easily imagine God creating a river for commercial purposes, for one million dollars' pay.

"Whitman says of his book:

" 'If I may give a hint of the spinal marrow of the business it is to possess the mind, memory, and cognisance with a full armoury of concrete actualities, observations, humanity, facts, technique, War, Peace, passion, politics, East, West, North, South, nothing too large or small. . . . Every page of my book smacks of the living physical identity, date and environment, and individuality beyond anything known, and in style often offensive to the convention.

" 'If my book is understood by the masses in two hundred years, it is all I hope for. What I live for is to put it to the Public as I desire it. When this is done, I shall die happy. As to the book's name, it named itself.'

" 'There are,' says Whitman, 'three universal things on earth, three which the king on his throne has not more fully than the Hottentot of the forest:

    " 'The common grass of earth.

    The common air of earth.

    The common passions of earth.'

To the doubting, timid soul he warns, 'Do not touch my book. It is a man, it breathes; you are putting your hands on a bare body.' He says, 'My book is for man who loves God and Nature above Art and manufacture. My book is for the common loves of earth; my book is for the common passions.' We find the penny liners, the small souls who have never fathomed his motives and never can, turning critic. They bewail his lack of col-

legiate education. We find Whitman thanking God for the chance to educate himself, and find him learned in the sciences and arts, passionately fond of music and opera, reading in the original Greek and Latin, French, Spanish, Italian, and German. We find critics bewailing that he did not follow formed lines and write legitimate verse. They cite his poem, 'My Captain,' written on the assassination of Lincoln, as an example. Tennyson says this is the greatest poem ever written in America and equal to anything ever done on the continent. Yet it will conform to no rules of verse. It has rhyme, nothing else. Yet it seems not a matter to mourn over, for if it fails in conformity to rules, it touches the human heart and passions which do not go by rule. It quickens the pulse; it wets the eye; it pulls the heart strings; it quivers the flesh. The doom and blackness of that dark day settles on you in personal disaster.

"Oh, Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,  
 The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won,  
 The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
 While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;  
     But O heart! heart! heart!  
     O bleeding drops of red,  
     Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
     Fallen, cold and dead.

Conformers to poetical laws refuse to call this poetry and bewail Whitman's lack of mechanism. Whitman says he has trouble to keep 'stock,' by which term he refers to rhyme and meter, out of his writings and scathingly calls the conformers to it 'Players of piano tunes, demented seekers of gold.' The principal divisions of his book are: 'Inscriptions,' 'Songs of Myself,' 'Children of Adam,' 'Drum Taps,' 'Sands at Seventy,' 'Good-bye, My Fancy.'

"It is a great book—greater than many—time may prove it the equal of any ever written. The master minds of the Nineteenth Century so pronounce it. The chapters explain themselves, till we come to the 'Children of Adam.' In this we find a manly salutation and the frankest confessions of pure passion to legitimate ends ever put in print. It comes with a shock to read, for we are unused to seeing or hearing matters here discussed in cold blood, mentioned. Words we have whispered in the heart strike stunning blows in printer's ink. Sanity cannot deny the old urge and urge of human passion. It is intermingled in the history of the ages; it upsets thrones and kingdoms; it is not relegated to hovels; princes and potentates fall; it is all true, the same old truth over and over since the ages, only—we hate to say so—it were pleasanter to cover it up and not mention.

"Whitman believes in letting in sunlight, in opening up dark places, in equalising forces, in making every organ of the human body as common as the hand or foot with as common functions to perform, as common purposes. All that spares this phase of the book is its honesty; its truest truth; its lack of lasciviousness or suggestive thought. If it brings a blush, it must not be for the author or what he has written, but for ourselves that the God-given power of pro-creation which it was meant we use, naturally, fully, freely as he describes, for the peopling of the earth with greater statesmen, poets, warriors, sailors, citizens, we have prostituted into a function exercised for our pleasure without creative intent or desire. Our blushes should not be for the author who holds up the mirror, but for the faces we see therein. The truth is Whitman, the shame and the pity of it is with us.

"As to the book, it is little known in America. Its best reception has been in Europe, where it was hailed at the first as the work of a master and warmly supported and read. That America did not welcome it was perhaps a disappointment, but one over which he never grieved. He had accomplished his aim; he could wait for the masses. Money did not matter. He continually refused sacrifice to the Golden Calf. Criticism did not matter; it was between him and his God, and he knew he was right. Persecution did not matter, for he figured that it came from mean, little, small souls who comprehended neither his motive in life, his purpose in his book, nor his hopes of immortality by his book on earth, nor his life work in the Hereafter.

"Ralph Waldo Emerson, the master American litterateur, writes him:

"WALT WHITMAN.

"DEAR SIR:

"I am not blind to the wonderful gift of *Leaves of Grass*. I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom America has yet contributed. I am happy in reading it as great power makes us happy. I give you joy in your free, brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things, said incomparably well, as they must be. I find courage of treatment which so delights us and which large perception only can inspire.

"I greet you at the beginning of your great career which must have had a long foreground somewhere for such a start. The book has the merits of fortifying and encouraging.

"I wish to meet you, my benefactor, and am coming to New York to pay my homage.

"EMERSON.

"Thoreau pronounced it the greatest book ever written. Tennyson, the greatest of America and with only three or four equals in Europe. Ruskin and Rossetti



gave highest praise. And to these English friends who read and appreciated while his slower home country was finding him out, ever went Whitman's gratefulest love. In America William O'Connor, Dr. Bucke, Traubel, John Burroughs, Thoreau, G. W. Childs, Carnegie, and Ingersoll were his warmest admirers, with Emerson in the foreground. Arnold made the trip to America to see Whitman and Niagara. Possibly he thought them synonymous terms. The high plunge of water into the boiling maelstrom below may have suggested the high life and thought of the man, boiling up in the maelstrom of words in which he seeks to embrace all men, creeds and religions, occupations, places, passions, or the reverse. I would not advise every one to attempt *Leaves of Grass*, the beautiful uncut hair of graves, the carpet God spread for his kings and savages, children of wealth and sin, black, white, red, and brown. If you believe in God; if you love the green grass, flowers, and trees; if you know what the leaves whisper and the waters murmur and the birds sing; if you love God's creation above man's manufacturing—read the book. If in your heart there is the throb of universal love and pity; if your hand has lain on the bare body of man and it has not frightened you, read the book. You will be better for it.

"Says Whitman: 'All this world seems beautiful to me. I am larger and better than I thought. The East and West are mine; the North and South. I inhale great draughts of space. All seems beautiful to me. I repeat over to men and women: You have done such good to me I would do the same to you. I will recruit for myself and you as I go, I will scatter myself among men and women.'"



## *Chapter XI*

### LIMBERLOST CABIN

MEANTIME Mr. Porter's business improved, and he erected a new building which combined space for the drug store, rooms for the bank, and quarters overhead for an hotel. He organized the Bank of Geneva, was made President of it, superintended the running of the hotel, took a partner to help him in the drug store, and bought three hundred and sixty acres of farm land five miles from town, on which he raised thoroughbred stock, the grain to feed them, fruit, vegetables, and dairy produce for his family. During this time the oil boom struck Geneva, and Mr. Porter leased his farm, and some sixty oil wells were drilled. These proved a good source of income, and aside from building a new house, barns, and various sheds on the farm, he began planning a new home for his little family.

With his wife's help, he designed what they called "Limberlost Cabin," which had fourteen rooms. The lower story was built of red cedar logs from Wisconsin, stained the natural colour, the logs mitred at the corners, the chinks filled with cement, the upper story and roof being redwood shingles stained in the same natural colour.

The name for the Cabin they took from the great Limberlost Swamp which at that time stretched in unbroken swale, underbrush, trees, and swamp for many square miles just south of the little town. In it grew a profusion of flowers, birds, and animals. It was a con-

stant lure to Mother, but it was not safe for a woman to enter alone, as it was the rendezvous for bad characters of all descriptions, and it got its name from a man named Limber who once went in alone on a hunting trip and never returned. Months afterward searching parties found the rusted barrel of his gun and the skeleton of the little dog that had accompanied him; but never a trace of Limber. Describing this swamp, Mother wrote:

"Flashing through the treetops of the Limberlost there are birds whose colour is more brilliant than that of the gaudiest flower lifting its face to the sunlight. The lilies of the mire are not so white as the white herons that fish among them. The ripest spray of golden-rod is not so highly coloured as the burnished gold on the breast of the oriole that rocks on it. The jays are bluer than the calamus bed they wrangle above with throaty chatter. The finches are a finer purple than the ironwort; while for every clump of foxfire flaming in the Limberlost there is a cardinal glowing redder on the bush above it."

When they moved into the new home they did not have a maid, but Mother was very strong, vital to the marrow, and she knew how to manage life to make it meet her needs, thanks to the training of her father and mother. Every morning she brushed her daughter's curls and started her to school, well fed and dressed. She had a conservatory which opened off the west end of her dining room with large sliding doors between. In this she kept a big cage which contained from ten to twenty-five canaries. She also had a parrot and a pair of Australian love birds, but in spite of a large house, a child, and

innumerable pets to care for daily, she managed her household affairs with an efficiency and an eye to time-saving that was a source of never-ending envy among her neighbours, most of whom were older and more experienced women.

About this time her executive ability was put to a severe test. On the night of June 11, 1895, the little town was aroused by cries of "Fire!" Dad was away from home, and I can remember Mother awaking me and a cousin who was visiting me. She told us to hurry into our clothes and lock the house, as she was going. From our front windows we could see a tremendous blaze. The village had no adequate fire protection. Mother quickly put on a pair of red Turkish bedroom slippers, not taking time for hose; fastened a skirt over her nightrobe; snatched up an old sweater, and ran out of the house.

We girls took a little more time dressing, but we could not stay in the house. The flames became larger and more furious, and we could hear shouts and screams. So away we went, deciding we would stay on the outskirts of the crowd, where Mother would not see us.

It was a depressing sight. The old frame buildings were burning furiously and men stood by watching the destruction of their property, seemingly powerless to act. But Mother figured out a way. Midway of the block stood Dad's hotel and bank building—the only brick structure in the town—and on the side next the fire there was a solid brick wall. Mother gathered the men about her.

"Our only hope, men, is to stop the fire at this wall. Otherwise, the entire business section will go. Who will help me?"

The only way to the roof of the building was up three flights of stairs, through an attic, and thence by ladder through a small trap door. Mother dispatched men for buckets, formed a line up the stairs, got a crew to take turns pumping water by hand from the well back of the hotel, and so the fight began.

As the flames grew hotter, the crew on the roof could only stand the heat for a short time. Mother put a crew of women to wrapping wet blankets around the heads of the men on the roof, and supplied them with cotton gloves from a near-by store, which they could dip in the water. She directed everything, keeping the men at work cheerfully and willingly. Her long hair was flying unnoticed; the frail slippers were burned through from stepping on fallen embers, and her feet were bleeding. Her hands were blistered, but her courage never faltered, and for three long hours they fought—and won. Mother's courage saved Dad's property and that of many others.

But even such tragedies have their humorous spots. The back steps of the hotel caught fire, and Mother told the excited cook to throw some water on the flames out of the reservoirs of the stoves, so as not to interfere with the men at the pump. A few minutes later she discovered him pouring a crock of milk over the steps. She asked him why he was using milk, and he replied: "The water in the tanks is boiling hot, so it wouldn't do. I got the milk out of the refrigerator, and it's ice cold!"

I will never forget how she shrieked with laughter as she told us, while we were helping her bandage the burned and swollen feet. But that was characteristic of Mother: no matter what the nerve strain or worry, she could always see the funny side to relieve the tension.

It was about this time that Mother first became interested in photography, and the possession of her first camera came about in a peculiar way. Having no brothers or sisters, I was allowed various pets, and among other things I was allowed to put Major, the parrot, on the back of a chair beside me at the dining table, where I could hand him scraps of food. One Sunday evening we were having oyster stew. There was little on the table that we thought Major would like, so we gave him his customary cracker dipped in coffee. But Major evidently was much interested in something else. He dropped the cracker and talked and coaxed while we tried to discover what it was he wanted.

Finally, I said, "Well, I guess he wants an oyster"; and I took one out of my plate of soup and gave it to him. I was evidently right, for he ate the whole thing with much relish and coaxed for another one. Mother was much surprised and remarked: "I wish I had a camera. I certainly would like to take a picture of a parrot eating a stewed oyster!"

It was near Christmas time, and Father and I exchanged glances that resulted in my saving all my spare pennies, with which I bought Mother's first camera, a little four by five Vio for which I paid ten dollars. Later, when she began the serious work of photographing wild life and needed a larger camera, she purchased one with money she obtained by selling some old family jewellery.

In the meantime, I was amusing myself with all sorts of pets. I had a Scotch collie dog, a tiger-striped Angora cat, a pair of bantam chickens, half a dozen guinea pigs, four rabbits, and a pair of tiny alligators which a friend of Father's sent to him from Florida in a cigar box.



Aside from these, I had a lot of little turtles in a bucket by the cistern, which I caught waddling along the edge of the Wabash River; I had a fruit can full of tiny garter snakes which I found in the grass; and in a small box I had six baby mice, which I took out of their nest and fed warm milk with a teaspoon. Furthermore, I was well acquainted with the fat old toad whose home was at the base of a wild-rose bush which clambered over the back of our house, and I knew where the two tree toads lived who climbed on our plate-glass window every night to catch gnats and insects attracted by the light within. I was taught not to be afraid of anything, and I handled all kinds of worms, butterflies, pinching bugs, and caterpillars without injury to myself or to them. I saved money to buy my own bicycle, and Father taught me to drive the horse so that I could roam at will over the farm, much as my mother had done when she was a youngster. The farmer's wife was a cheerful soul who had eight children of her own, and I was welcome to go and stay all day Saturday or Sunday, one more never making any difference. I helped gather fruit, make garden, pick berries, feed the chickens, and gather mushrooms, so that all the time Mother was busy with her music, embroidery, painting, housekeeping, cooking and photography, she still kept me interested in the big outdoors and taught me the ways of plant and animal life.

I had a family of ten dolls of various sizes, and I learned to sew by making their clothing. I had a folding doll bed, and I learned to make beds by being taught how to make the little doll bed properly. I learned to piece little quilts and make pillows and sheets for the doll bed. I had a little doll dresser, and I learned to keep the drawers neat by taking care of the dolls' clothing. I had





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*At twenty-five*



a little outdoor oven under the spreading apple tree and some cooking utensils where I learned to cook very tasty little meals. Thus I learned sewing and cooking while at play, so that they never seemed unpleasant tasks which had to be done. I had a playhouse which I had to keep swept and dusted and which I had decorated as well as I could with pictures cut from magazines and flowers I gathered in the woods or in the garden.

There was an old stump in our orchard, and around this I had my wild-flower bed. I used to fasten a basket on the handlebars of my bicycle, take a trowel, and come home with all sorts of ferns and wild flowers which Mother taught me how to take up and transplant.

I was not allowed to play much with the children of the town, so that when I was home Mother spent considerable time with me. I had to help with the sweeping and dusting on Saturdays, and each evening had to set the table and wipe the dishes.

I was never allowed any kind of rich food or pastry, and never had a piece of candy until I was past four years old. The diet Mother prescribed consisted of vegetables, fruit, a small amount of meat, plenty of milk, and an occasional piece of loaf sugar for sweets. We had two "stunts" which were performed with regularity for many years as soon as spring came. One was to gather the delicious and tender young dock, dandelion, and horse-radish leaves, which we boiled with a ham bone. "Greens" we called them, and while we were very fond of them, Father always made fun of us and called them "fodder."

In our back yard there was a Morello cherry tree, and when the cherries were ripe it was my job to climb the tree with a little tin bucket over my arm and pick

them. Mother and I seeded them together, and then Mother baked a marvellous cherry pie. We never waited for meal time, but cut the pie as soon as it was baked, and sat on the steps of the back porch devouring it, with the juice dripping in all directions.

We always had a little vegetable garden, and I can remember many times when we each took a pinch of salt in our hands and pulled radishes, onions, or tomatoes, wiped the dust or dirt off on the grass, and munched them contentedly. Or else we went to the berry vines, strung raspberries on long, clean wheat straws, and laid them on the ice to cool. Later, they were served on plates with a little pile of powdered sugar for dessert.

Mother was much interested in learning to bake bread, and she got a recipe from one of her friends who baked delicious home-made bread. I remember how painstakingly she went through the entire process until the loaves were in the oven, and with what almost breathless interest and anticipation she peeped through the crack in the oven door to see if the loaves were browning properly. Of course, I was hoping that I might have the crust from one loaf while it was hot, well saturated with butter, as I often did later; but when the loaves were brown and taken from the oven, they seemed to weigh a ton apiece, and it was absolutely impossible to make even a dent in them with a knife.

Mother was terribly disappointed, but her unfailing sense of humour prevailed. She went to the barn and got the hatchet and a dozen six-inch spike nails. These she carried to the house and drove into the bread. Then she wrapped it very carefully in white tissue paper and tied it with a blue ribbon, added a little bunch of flowers,

and sent me to carry it to the woman from whom she had gotten the recipe!

I well remember one day when a burly, disreputable-looking tramp knocked at the back door and asked for something to eat. Mother had been trained to feed all strangers, but my father had absolutely forbidden her to do it because it was unsafe for her to unlatch the screen door for fear the tramps might force their way into the house. So she told the man she was sorry but she had nothing she could give him. Just as he turned to go, our parrot whistled a bar of "Over the fence is out." The tramp was furious, and came back to the door to know what "impudent kid" was making fun of him. I was wide-eyed with fright, but before Mother had time to answer him, Father came in the front gate and the tramp hurried down the back walk.

I went with Mother on many of her trips afield, and she always taught me not to be afraid of anything. The few things that were really dangerous she taught me about, and told me what to do in case I ever met them. She always said if I went through the woods attending strictly to my own business and not paying any attention to any of the wild things, that the wild things would pay no attention to me. But when you are afraid, animals know it; they are immediately antagonistic; and that is where the trouble begins.

I was accustomed to all sorts of birds and little animals and insects in the house. Almost any place in our house you might find a glass turned down over a little patch of moth eggs on a rug to protect them; you might find a little strip of paper pinned on a window curtain to protect another batch; you might find a wounded bird, which

was being doctored, perched almost anywhere; you might find several different size boxes containing baby caterpillars just hatched, feeding on the particular kind of leaves that they ate; you might find cocoons pinned almost anywhere, and newly emerged moths and butterflies flying through the house and feeding on the flowers in the conservatory. There were little saucers of honey and sweetened water and dampened lumps of sugar placed in different spots for their food. In this way Mother taught me not to be afraid. She taught me how to handle all these things without hurting them; and if they are not hurt, they will not bite or sting. I used to have fun chasing some of our visitors over the yard with baby snakes, toads, and pinching bugs.

While Mother and I were on a visit to her older sister, Florence Compton, in Michigan, an incident occurred which shows what training a child to be unafraid will do. We were driving along a narrow road close by one of the swamps for which southern Michigan was then noted when I spied some wild flowers which I wanted to gather. My uncle obligingly stopped the horse, and I ran ahead, stooping over the edge of the road to gather the blossoms.

From across the road behind me came slowly one of those short, fat rattlesnakes known in that country as Massasaugas, but just as poisonous as the better known Diamond Back rattler. Mother saw the snake but said nothing, as she did not wish to frighten me. I was unconscious of its presence until I saw it creeping slowly between my feet. My first thought was that I must keep perfectly still; so I merely straightened my body, thus lifting my hands out of its range of vision. The snake crept on into the swamp about its business without notic-



ing me, and I finished gathering my flowers and went back to the carriage. The average mother would undoubtedly have screamed, in which case the average child would undoubtedly have jumped and stepped on the snake with disastrous results. But Mother was never a merely average mother.

Mother mastered photography to such a degree of proficiency that the manufacturers of one of our finest brands of print paper once sent the manager of their factory to learn how she handled the paper. This was a bit embarrassing to Mother, as her dark room was nothing more than the family bathroom with a wooden shutter fitting tight over the window, and rugs stuffed under the cracks of the door to keep out the light. Her negatives and prints she washed on turkey platters in the kitchen sink. So when she was asked to give a demonstration of how she handled her prints, she rather resented it. After all, she could scarcely understand why the men who manufactured the paper did not know how to handle it. So when the manager arrived, she told him she thought the difference in results might lie in the chemical properties of the water, and sent him on his way satisfied.

Of this experience Mother writes:

"Possibly this was the reason, but I have a shrewd suspicion that the real reason lay in high-grade plates, a perfect exposure, a judicious development, and self-compounded chemicals which were ordered for me through my husband's drug store straight from the factory. I think plates swabbed with cotton before development, intensified if of short exposure, thoroughly swabbed again, and carefully dried, had much to do with it, and

the print paper, handled in the same painstaking manner, had more. On hot days I hung salt bags of ice underneath the faucets, as the water came from a tank in our attic which was very warm on summer days and it melted the gelatine on the plates if it was not cooled. So my little mother's rule of 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might' also held good in my photography."

As I grew older, I had a tennis court on the back lot, and a rifle which my father taught me to shoot. Father bought a rowboat and kept it on the Wabash River for use on our picnics and fishing expeditions, as we were accustomed to spending Sundays and all holidays in the woods, they being the only days Father could get away from business. I was taught to row the boat and allowed to take the gun along on these trips; but I was only allowed to shoot at a mark. I was forbidden to kill anything, either bird or animal. I was taught how to fish, and when I grew tired of that, I usually curled up under a tree with a book and went to sleep.

## Chapter XII

### HER FIRST STORY

IN the meantime, the fever to write had raged within Mother until it became a compelling influence and dominated her whole life, her home, her entertainments, her amusements, and her work. After I was old enough to go to school, Mother spent many secret hours with her pen. She found time to study and write until editors began to accept her material. For her first accepted work she was paid the fine, upstanding sum of sixteen dollars! She began by sending photographs and natural history hints to *Recreation*, and after the first few instalments she was asked to take charge of their camera department and furnish material each month, in return for which she was paid in the highest grade photographic material.

After a year of this work, she had more than a thousand dollars' worth of equipment. The second year she raised this five hundred dollars, and having had a little disagreement with the editor, she was given a place in the Natural History Department of *Outing*. Caspar Whitney, the editor at the time, coached her as to what he wanted, and she had sufficient brain and natural resource to apply what he taught her to other writing. After working for him a year, she decided to try short stories; so she mixed a little childhood fact with a large degree of grown-up fiction and wrote her first story, which she entitled "Laddie, the Princess, and the Pie."

About this she writes:

"I was abnormally sensitive about trying to accomplish any given thing and failing. I had been taught in our home that it was black disgrace to undertake anything and fail. If you started, you simply must finish, and in good shape. My husband's drug store carried books and magazines, and it was impossible to take departments in any of them and not have it known, but few people in our locality read *Recreation* and *Outing*. None of them were interested in photography, and very few in Natural Science, so that what I was doing was not known. So when the little story was finished, I went to our drug store and looked over the magazines. I chose one with an attractive cover, good type and paper, containing stories of the same character as mine, and on the back of an old envelope, hidden behind the counter, I scribbled: 'Perriton Maxwell, 116 Nassau Street, New York.'

"Then I went home and sent my story on its way. Then I took a bold step, the first in my self-emancipation. Money was beginning to come in, and I had some in my purse of my very own that I had earned when no one knew I was working. I argued that if I kept my family so comfortable that they missed nothing from my usual routine, I had a right to do what I could toward furthering my personal ambitions in time I could save for that purpose, and until I could earn money enough to hire capable people to take my place, I held rigidly to rule, so that I who, without fear or trembling, climbed over fences, walked across ploughed fields, worked from ladders high in air, and crossed water on improvised rafts without a tremor, slipped timidly into the post office and rented a box, so that, if my work was returned,

my husband and the men in the bank need not know what I had attempted by seeing any returned manuscript. There was no mail delivery in the little town, and formerly all my mail had been put in the bank box.

"This was early in May. All summer I waited. I knew that it required a long time for an editor to reach and pass upon material sent him, but my waiting did seem out of all reason. I was too busy keeping my Cabin and my family and doing my field work to pine, but I did decide that Mr. Maxwell was a mean old thing to throw away my story and keep the return postage. Also, I was deeply chagrined. I had thought quite well of my effort myself, and this seemed to prove that I did not know even the first principles of what would be considered an interesting story.

"Then one day in September I went into our store on an errand and the manager said to me: 'I read your story in the *Metropolitan* last night. It was great! Did you ever write any fiction before?'

"My head whirled, but I had learned to keep my own counsel, so I said as lightly as I could, while my heart thumped until I thought he would hear it: 'No, it's just a simple little story. I'd like a few copies for my sisters.'

"Then I wrote Mr. Maxwell a note telling him that I had seen my story in his magazine and saying I was glad he had liked it enough to use it. His answer came quickly. It was a strong, manly letter that warmed the cockles of my heart and set my brain whirling. Mr. Maxwell wrote that he liked my story very much, but the office boy had lost or destroyed my address with the wrappings, so he had illustrated it the best he could and used it, hoping I would see it and write to him. He said so many people had spoken to him of a new, fresh

note in it that he wished me to consider doing him another in similar vein for his Christmas leader, and he enclosed my very first check for fiction."

For the following ten years Mother was very prompt about filling every order she accepted for either pictures or manuscript without a thought of consideration for herself; and she disappointed the confident expectations of her nearest and dearest by keeping sane, normal, and the healthiest woman they knew.

"To business that we love we rise betimes,  
And go to it with delight."

The joy she got from her work could develop nothing other than cheer and strength for greater effort. For her field work she used a knee-length khaki skirt with high leather hiking boots, a blouse or sweater of either brown or green, which blended with the outdoor colours, and a hat to match. She carried a revolver for protection. To the country folk of the Limberlost region, Rainbow Bottom, the Canoper, and the banks of the Wabash, a little black horse and buggy loaded with cameras and paraphernalia, and a woman dragging a camera, tripod, and often a stepladder, became a common sight; but few of them realised what she was trying to do or what it would mean if she succeeded. Gradually, the interest in the music, painting, and other diversions slipped away, and she became wrapped up in her literary work, and was consequently criticised because she had no time for anything else.

One summer, about this time, Mother and I went to Coldwater, Michigan, to visit her sister Florence. It was during her stay there that she made her first public



speech. There was a Chautauqua in progress, and when it was known that the "Bird Woman" was in the city, she was besieged with invitations to address one of the meetings. Mother was naturally timid; she dreaded publicity of any sort, and at first she refused to speak or even to appear. Finally, the President of the Chautauqua Board called, and after much persuasion she consented. Her sister writes of this appearance:

"I think I never saw Gene in all my life when she looked so lovely as when she walked onto the stage, with the flood lights glowing and her eyes sparkling with excitement. She wore a yellow dress covered with black lace and carried a black lace fan. The tent was packed, and as she walked onto the platform and the audience started to give her an ovation, they turned a spotlight on her. The crowd went wild; but the light startled Gene, and as she shaded her eyes with her hands, she said:

"'What did you do that for? Please turn off that light.'

"A wave of disappointment seemed to sweep over the audience, but Gene seemed to realise the situation, for she said quickly: 'The light is too strong for my eyes.' That saved the day; the tense situation was relieved, and she went on with her talk."

This was during the time of the World's Fair in Chicago, and it was decided that Mother should stay with her sister's children while Mr. and Mrs. Compton went to the Fair, and when they returned, I should stay with them and Mother and Father should go to the Fair. Aunt Florence had a picture of Mother which Mother thoroughly detested, and just a few hours before she left, Mother took a bar of soap and streaked the glass until

it was unrecognisable. We children stood around her, watching in delighted surprise this evidence of mischievousness in a grown-up, and wondering what Aunt Florence would say when she found the picture, which she did not discover until after Mother and Father were safely on their way to Chicago.

While at the Fair, Mother was particularly interested in people from foreign countries, and spent most of her time there trying to make herself understood, using interpreters when necessary, so that she could talk to them and find out about their manners and customs.

## *Chapter XIII*

### "THE SONG OF THE CARDINAL"

IT was during this time that Mother's back and shoulders began to ache from writing everything in long-hand. I found an old typewriter down at the Bank, taught myself to use it, and began to do her typing. It was a slow process, and to this day I do most of my own typing with three fingers of each hand. It was our custom for her to sit beside me and read to me slowly enough for me to type the copy as she read.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, when both of us had grown pretty tired, we used to take sacks of food and walk out the East pike, which led to a bridge across the river. It was a wonderful place for birds, and they grew to know us and expect our coming. Especially during the winter, when snow was deep and food scarce, the birds waited our coming with particular eagerness. I think Mother loved most the brilliant red cardinals which flashed back and forth through the snow-covered branches like streaks of fire. It was on one of these walks that she found the mangled body of one of her beloved cardinals left lying in the road where some hunter had shot it merely to test his marksmanship. In a fervour of love for the bird, sorrow for such an end to its life, indignation with the hunter, and with a heart boiling with various emotions, she sang the life history of the little dead cardinal with the point of her eager pen. She did a ten-thousand-word story, illustrated it with photo-

graphs that she made herself, called it "The Song of the Cardinal," and sent it to Richard Watson Gilder, who was then editor of the *Century*.

In a short time she had a letter penned in his own hand saying that her story was "delicious" and that he would love to use it, but that it would scarcely be fair for him to do so when it had the possibilities it contained for her future. He suggested that she amplify it to fifty thousand words, fully illustrate it, and send it to a publishing house that he thought would undoubtedly publish it.

Mother followed his advice and had the writing done in a month, together with a series of illustrations which covered the life of a pair of cardinals from the time of their courting until their babies were hatched and flew away. *The Song of the Cardinal* was accepted and published in 1903. To-day the cardinal has been around the world, singing all the way, as the book has been translated into seven different languages, including the Arabic, and put into Braille point for the blind. So perhaps the life of the little dead bird, lying cold and frozen in the road, was sacrificed for a good cause.

It was while securing an illustration for this book which she wanted to use as a tailpiece for one of the chapters that Mother contracted a very serious illness. It was a stifling hot day in early August, and she had lain all morning on the top of a sand bank with her head hanging over the edge watching for a pair of baby kingfishers to come to the opening of their tunnel so that she might squeeze the bulb in her hand from which a tiny rubber hose led to a focussed camera concealed by a pile of brush. After securing this picture, she waded waist deep in the cool water of the Wabash River to get a study of river mallows which were blooming along its edge.

On the way home she had a severe chill and became unconscious; but the faithful little horse took her home, and the hired man found her, a huddled little heap in one corner of the buggy seat. She narrowly escaped a sunstroke, and for three weeks lay twisted in convulsions of congestion, her head drawn back between her shoulders, insensible to the efforts of doctors and nurses, who admitted that they would probably have failed if it had not been for her iron constitution.

Although most of the criticisms and reviews of this first book were marvellous, even then some of the critics began to make their ignorant and unverified statements. One wrote that the natural history was “terrible” because cardinals were strictly seed eaters. I can distinctly remember that the one lure effective for almost any kind of a bird was raw Hamburg steak, or a piece of beefsteak scraped into bits with a knife. A little of this is even good for canaries.

Another review in a San Francisco paper said there were no farmers like Abram. To him Mother replied:

“Shades that are and are to be! of Washington Irving, Whittier, Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Joaquin Miller, Enos Mills, John Muir, John Burroughs, and all the mighty host of men past and present who have lived their life on land! Shades of my father, whom I wrote into and all over the character of Abram, a man who daily worked in the soil, and who read the big books from Confucius down, and whose speech teemed with the high perfection of phrasing of Isaiah, whom he read daily and could quote literally throughout!”

Curiously enough, this reviewer made no reply to her letter.

Out of gratitude for one particularly appreciative and

sympathetic review, Mother wrote to the reviewer and received the following response:

New York City,  
October 28th, 1903.

DEAR MRS. PORTER:

If my review was an oasis in the desert of general criticism for you, much more was your friendly letter a cheering vision in the waste of daily, weekly weariness that falls to my lot in my business life. I wonder why those who fall to the critic's lot do not more often give us an appreciative token, as you have done. We need it. If we are conscientious we *do* put honest soul fibre into the work—yet it all seems shot into the air. Personally, I feel like one who is ever writing, writing, to some distant friend—who never answers my letters. It's the most hollow, echoless, unresponsive task that ever chilled a naturally warm heart. You see, I have my "sore spots," too—and I'm a woman, therefore sensitive.

That I should read your book was only natural, since it gave me sincere pleasure; that I should understand follows, because I love both bird and beast devotedly, and have passed many hours with them in their haunts, for pure kinship's sake. One could not read your work without understanding that you had sacrificed ease to obtain your results, and that your inherent interests had been amplified and intensified by thorough research and intimate study of your subjects. But for space limitation I should have made more mention of the colour values of your effective word painting which especially appealed to me.

I have received one other appreciative letter from an author whose book I reviewed: *The Woman Who Toils*,



by Marie Van Vorst and Bessie Van Vorst. The former wrote me from Paris, a most pleasing note of thanks. These are the things that make for a bit of radiance in the grey discomfort of life. It is I who should thank you, and I do, most cordially,

AIMÉE LENALIE.

P. S. Should you ever come to New York, I shall ask you to autograph *The Song of the Cardinal*, as the reviewing copy has come into my possession, and I hope to meet you sometime.

Of this first success Mother wrote:

“With a glad heart and with ideals lifted still higher by the warm praise given the literary value of this book, I determined to preserve myself from the sin of deterioration by ever going back and using amateur work after success came. So, on a roaring wood fire in my library, I cremated *Mademoiselle Dinvar*, the book modelled after *Lucile*; a romantic poem, ‘The King’; two short novels; a book of poems; and three short stories. I thought I was doing the right thing then; now I am much afraid it was wanton sacrifice to a high ideal. Every day I use material I can write no better than I could then for either freshness or originality. The facility acquired by practice could have been used in re-writing.”

So it was that we lost some of her earliest work, full of romance and high imagination which she herself felt she did not surpass in later years.

## Chapter XIV

### "FRECKLES" AND OTHER BOOKS

THE next spring, while Mother was wandering in the outskirts of the Limberlost, a huge feather drifted from the clouds and fell at her feet. She examined it and decided it was a feather from the wing of a black vulture. The feather had a shaft twenty and a quarter inches long and was three inches in width at its widest point. After watching the sky intently for a few moments, she saw the bird come into view and disappear in the swamp not far from where she was standing. The thought occurred to her that the bird might have a nest there, and after a diligent hunt she finally found it in the hollow trunk of a tree which had blown over, about seven feet back from the opening, so that it was necessary to crawl back into the log to see what was in the nest.

My father was a small man, so he was elected to do this part of the work. As vultures live on carrion, it was not a delectable place to work, and Father had to change his clothing before and after entering the hollow log, and both he and Mother had to work with cloths saturated in listerine or witch hazel tied over their noses. They found two eggs in the nest, which were brought to light, photographed, and carefully put back. One egg never hatched, but Mother got a complete series of the other baby, taking his picture every two days from the time he was born until he flew away.

This experience was her inspiration for *Freckles*,

which was published in October, 1904. To the life of the bird she added a Scotch lumberman who taught her the value of the curly maples and black walnut in the Limberlost; a kindly woman who always came out when Mother drove across her barn lot to ask about her and caution her to be careful; the boy Freckles, who is a composite of high ideals merged with field experiences of an oil man who helped her a great deal in her field work; and for the girl an idealised picture of her own girl. About this she used to say she hoped her daughter would never live to feel about the book as she once heard Mrs. Burnett's son express himself concerning *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. It was this idea of Mother's, consistently followed through all her writing, of putting real people into her books, of having them say the things that they really said, and of having them do the things which they really did, that made her books so tremendously popular. It was this human touch that appealed to the hearts of her readers and that was the reason for the popularity of her books which so many critics are still at a loss to understand. It was this quality that supplied the “something” that all the critics said her books had, and for which they could never find a name.

Mother was always pleased that this book, *Freckles*, helped the boys. Letters telling tales of all sorts came from all over the country. One woman wrote that reading it had completely changed the ideas of her brother, a motherless lad whom she was vainly endeavouring to make into a manly man; that since reading the book he had gone to work, led a clean life, married, and founded a home, and named his little daughter Gene after Mother. The warden of one of the big reformatories in the West wrote that *Freckles* was the most loved book among

fifteen hundred boys under age in his charge, and that three copies a year were worn to fragments in the library. Boys wrote from the ends of the world that they were hunting specimens like *Freckles*; that they were sticking to hard jobs like *Freckles*; and one poor soul wrote from a tuberculosis hospital in the New England mountains that if he had to die he was going to face the end as *Freckles* did.

The Superintendent of Schools of Pocatello, Idaho, wrote his appreciation of *Freckles* as follows:

MY DEAR MADAM:

May I offer you my testimony on *Freckles*? It has been singing in my heart ever since I read it, and lingers in my memory as a sweet perfume. I consider your dedication the most graceful tribute I have ever read.

*Freckles* must enlarge the hearts of all who read. That bit of God's out-of-doors, the Limberlost, has been made mine for all time. I thank you sincerely.

WALTER R. SIDERS.

Hugh Childers, eminent British critic, wrote to Mother under date of June 17, 1905, from 35 Bedford Gardens, Kensington, W., London:

"It was a genuine pleasure for me to read your book, *Freckles*, and several friends, whose opinion I value, spoke to me very warmly of your descriptions of natural history and scenery in the, to us unfortunately little known, forest country of the States.

"I shall be much interested in seeing your book dealing with the Protection of Birds, and I shall hope to review it; it is a matter which I think of great interest.

"I am interested to hear that you are half English:

Stratton is a very good family name here, and no doubt Stratton Street, Piccadilly, is called from it. Lord Northbrook's house in Hampshire is Stratton.

"Believe me, very truly yours,  
"HUGH CHILDERS."

During the latter part of 1904 and 1905, Mother wrote a series of bird articles for the *Ladies' Home Journal*, and later, deciding that she would like to put her photographs of birds and experiences with them into a book, she published *What I Have Done with Birds* early in 1907. At first the books went slowly because of the nature work. People could scarcely be induced to believe that there really was a novel between the covers, because the stories wound slowly toward their ends, stopping their leisurely course for birds, flowers, lichen faces, blue sky, perfumed wind, and the closest intimacies of the daily life of common folk. But time has wrought a change in the sentiment against nature work and interest in it. Men and women who years ago looked at nature with unseeing eyes are now straining every muscle to accumulate enough knowledge to send them in a friendly way among the birds and flowers and trees.

Mother realised that she could not reach the hearts of the people with nature subjects alone. There must be some romance and human interest. But she would not spend her time writing a book based upon human passion and its outworking. She would not choose her characters from the seething cesspools of life, and I have always been glad that she was never a literary scavenger. She compromised on books in which she put all the nature work that came naturally within their bounds, and seasoned it with bits from the lives of the men and women

she had known intimately as they lived in the simple, common way with which she was familiar.

Because the nature books alone scarcely paid expenses, she promised her publishers that she would alternate with first a nature book and then a novel. So, in December, 1907, she published *At the Foot of the Rainbow*, which contained the requisite romance and also a portion of natural history.

In August, 1909, she published a book which is undoubtedly the least known of any she ever wrote, but which is also undoubtedly the one which required the most real work and research. This was *Birds of the Bible*. With painstaking care she read the entire Bible and copied every reference even remotely connected with birds made in it. The book is composed of the histories of these birds, either as she knew them from personal experience, or as she obtained them from the personal experience of others, and it is illustrated with her own photographs so far as this was possible. Pictures of storks and other birds which we do not have in this country were obtained either from museums or photographers of other countries. It is a tremendously interesting book, but one which is very little known. She wrote concerning this book:

"As I searched for material for this book, there slowly dawned upon me the sane and true things said of birds in the Bible as against the amazing statements of Aristotle, Pliny, and other writers of near the same period in pagan nations. This led to the search for the dawn of bird history, and the very first picture preserved ever made of birds. It was a merry chase, and it led me around the world, through books and galleries and mu-



seums; but it was uplifting and inspiring work that I loved to do. By what I would have given for and thought of such a book in my childhood, I gauged what people might think now, and thereby made my one error in my judgment concerning my own work. I thought ministers would find new meaning, beauty, proof of sanity and truth in the Bible through it; I thought Sabbath-school teachers would hail it as a godsend in their work of interesting the young in the Bible; I thought every home honoured by the possession of a Bible would like these beautiful poetical and wonderful quotations sifted out for them and made tangible for them by photographs under one cover in a hand volume.

“So I urged my publisher to spare no pains or expense in making a beautiful book, and he did as I requested. I designed the cover of willow bark from a tree in Palestine with the head of a hoopoe protruding from the opening to its nest. After working unceasingly for many months myself and inciting my publisher to a triumph in bookmaker’s art, I waited for the Christian homes of the land to set the stamp of their approval on my long and difficult task. I wondered if any one would dream, in examining those beautifully reproduced studies, that I had been compelled to handle and literally to burrow in poison-ivy vines to secure studies of the brooding peacock; if they would suspect that I carried a mirror from a dresser top and set it up in a barnyard to throw a ray of light through a window on to the nest of a swallow among the rafters of a barn; or guess what lice rained upon me from various nests, what mosquitoes and insects stung me, how perspiration almost blinded me, or how tired and dirty I came in each night from my day’s work afield.

"But the people did not think any of the things I thought they would, and the book had a disappointingly slow sale."

In August, 1909, *A Girl of the Limberlost* was published. This novel was, in a way, a continuation of *Freckles*, filled with wood lore, as usual, but pertaining more to moths than to birds. Mother had been picturing these exquisite night fliers during her field work among the birds, and she could see how it would be possible for a girl who needed money, rightly constituted and environed, to make a good living by working with moths. So she thought out the girl on a strictly psychological basis, drew the mother from a woman she knew intimately, put in the little boy who was a neighbour and daily visited in our home, and wrote the story.

It is a book which presents a hundred pictures that would draw its readers in close touch with nature, which was Mother's primal object in every line she wrote. The human side of the book is a faithful portrayal of people with whom she was acquainted. It was the first book translated into Arabic in a deliberate effort to introduce our methods of nature study into that land. In 1919, during the World War, ten years after its publication, Mother received the following letter from a soldier in France, written out of a deep appreciation of what the book had done for him.

France,

January 17, 1919.

MY DEAR MRS. PORTER:

If my memory is correct, it was just one year ago this afternoon that I wandered into Camp Meade with not a few misgivings about my undertaking. I am celebrating

the anniversary in rather an unexpected way—indeed, a pleasant one, and because one of your books figures in it, I am writing you.

I came up to my billet at 7:30. The old Frenchman, probably a widower, was sitting alone at a fireplace fully six feet long heating *café*. He invited me to share his fire, which I was glad indeed to do, for I have not been near dry since a week ago to-day when we started the sixty-mile hike. He built it up blazing hot and I furnished the candle. Just before I left the last post, three pouches of Bull Durham tobacco were piled at my plate. I put it in my locker for emergency. All Frenchmen smoke, and there is virtually no tobacco in France. Consequently, a Frenchman will almost give you his house for a little *tabac*. I brought a pouch out, and I saw I had a friend.

I unfolded my army chair, pulled off my boots, and opened a copy of *A Girl of the Limberlost*. I brought it from Paris over a month ago and carried it in my bedding roll on the hike, but was unable to touch it till now. I have read only one chapter, and I just felt that I ought to write a letter expressing myself. And as I write the old gent is as amused as a youngster at the workings of the first typewriter he ever saw.

I have not yet explained that I am on the direct road from Verdun to St. Mihiel. Things are badly mussed up all around us, and cooties are so thick that I am in no mood to brag about escaping them so far. Saw them aplenty at the last post. Perhaps your books have not been read under much more unusual circumstances, and to add to the quaint old fireplace, and the odd old man, and the rather striking contrast of an American soldier

is the fact that two planes whirred overhead just as I began reading.

The copy of the book has done some travelling. It has not been in the same town any two nights for a week up to last night, and it will take another trip to-morrow and probably another the next day, and likely I will carry it back to Paris next week. One night—last Sunday—in a drenching rain we reached our camp site at an hour or so past midnight. Fearing I could find no billet, I threw my bedding roll down in a mud hole, tucked the book under my mattress, and had a couple of hours' rest with the rain pelting down on the flaps of my roll. When I dressed in the rain in the morning before daylight the book shared my wetting, and still shares it with me.

I must stop to tell you that, with the detestable hourly rains and slippery mud, France is in part in flower. Just out of my window is a garden with lettuce, garlic, and some cultivated flower, the latter in bloom. By the wall, a bush with catkins in full bloom. Just over the fence are hundreds of little daisies. I may enclose one. But I wouldn't take this part of France as a gift if I had to live here. On our four-day hike, we passed through perhaps fifty villages, and I never saw such God-forsaken looking places.

Well, I must get back to my interesting book. I have *Freckles* in my library, but that has not caught up to me yet; also, *The Harvester*. They have been read hard. I shall now turn my chair back to the great hearth and imagine I am in the swamps of Indiana.

Hargeville, January 20.

I have scarcely seen a bit of fire since I began this letter some days since. There are few fireplaces in billets.

I have been too cold to write. Have walked about and joined little shivering groups of men. To-day I visited an old cemetery in a town near by and saw several kinds of flowers in bloom, including snowdrops.

Last night I got in from mess about five and my room was so damp and cold that I could not sit up to write, so I went to bed and began again to read *A Girl of the Limberlost*. I burned out one candle and lighted another. I was astonished when I finished the book to see that it was 2 A.M. I surely enjoyed it. It sounded so American, and the nature suggestions brought me back to myself again. I have wondered if I would be able to drop back in my old groove when I return and enjoy the things which used to give me my finest recreation. The book helped assure me that I could. I want to thank you for it.

Very sincerely yours,  
C. H. FRICK,  
Chaplain 313 Inf., A. E. F.

From Dulwich Village, London, came this letter:

DEAR MADAM:

I have just been reading, with much pleasure and interest, *Freckles* and *A Girl of the Limberlost*, and as it is obvious that you took very great pleasure in writing the books, I feel that I want to write and tell you how much pleasure I, and all my friends, have derived from them. I am sure, also, that we have unconsciously—some of us perhaps consciously—benefited by their good influence. I like *A Girl of the Limberlost* best, and I am sure that my acquaintanceship with your book has increased my natural love for nature and the country.

I am a Scottish highlander, born and ‘brought up’ amid



the beautiful surroundings of the capital of the Scottish Highlands, and I have also had the privilege of a very brief, but very delightful sojourn in your own great country, from which I have brought back, and shall retain for all time, the most pleasant recollections, including the musical evening spent in the labourer's cottage, and the meeting of the President in his Palace.

But what I want to say is that your books are among my valued possessions. I am a comparatively "successful man" in business in this great city of London, and while my lot seems as if it would be permanently cast in this not unpleasant channel, the influences at work when I read your books touch, I know, the deeper, more vital and real fibres of my nature—appeal to what is noblest and best, and rekindle the vision glorious that ever smoulders within. Oh, that one could only preserve the path which such vision discloses!

I beg to remain, Madam,

Yours most respectfully,

FERGUS NORMAN MACHERN.

A Missouri school teacher writes:

DEAR MRS. PORTER:

Fearing a letter from a stranger might not be appreciated, I have long hesitated to write, but I am impelled to do so by this consideration: It has always seemed to me that if I had the happy talent to be a successful author, nothing would give me as much real happiness as to know that my books had been an inspiration. Hoping this feeling within me is but a proof of human likeness, I am "sending you your roses."

In 1910 I read *A Girl of the Limberlost* aloud to my Eighth Grade class. One member of the very bright class—many of whom then were headed for our State



University—was a girl who was the equal of any in brain power, but whose life won her the sympathy of her class. Her father was a drunkard, had been since I first knew Ruby. Her mother was "shif'less"—in the expressive language of the Middle West. She read library books while others helped provide for the family. Immediately after reading *A Girl of the Limberlost*, Ruby joined the ranks of those looking forward to a high school and university course.

I was able to give her a little help in getting places the first summer—unfortunately I was not a "Bird Woman"—and she is now a junior in high school, ranking among the best in a large class. Her ambition has apparently reformed her family. That spring the family left the father, the mother and older sister went to work, and when Ruby was at work the little ones were placed in a day nursery.

This is just one of the many true stories of inspiration which I feel must have been accomplished by *A Girl of the Limberlost*. We are reading the book again in Eighth Grade this year, and I have asked my Seventh Grade teacher to read *Freckles* each year—I cannot add for the benefit of the boys, for boys and girls are equally interested and equally benefited.

Hoping my little story may be as welcome as it would have been to me had I been the fortunate creator of Elnora Comstock and you the teacher-reader, I am,

Admiringly yours,  
NINA K. SLATER.

A Yorkshire schoolgirl writes:

"You must have a beautiful spirit to invent such people as dear Freckles, the Angel, and Elnora. It has been one of my ambitions all along to write a book, but I

can't express myself. I think and think, but cannot put my thoughts on paper. I am only seventeen and hope one day to be of some use in the world and so delight people as you have done. No doubt you have hundreds of letters similar to this, but I do ask you to remember one girl in England who thinks you have the most beautiful spirit possible."

But with all its popularity, *A Girl of the Limberlost* also had its criticisms. One woman wrote: "I see you write of automobiles on the island of Mackinac, and I am led to wonder if the vast amount of natural history contained in the book is no closer truth than this statement."

This so provoked Mother that she answered:

"If your mental calibre is of such balance that you are led to doubt the verity of my natural history because I placed an automobile, in a fiction story, in a location where they have recently been forbidden for the reason that if they were not traffic would be congested, it would be a great favour to me if the next time you see a book of mine lying alone and defenseless you would look the other way!"

Finally, to still the flood of questions that poured in about the book, and at the request of the editor of *World's Work*, Mother wrote for that magazine an article entitled "Why I Wrote *A Girl of the Limberlost*." It appeared in 1911 and reads as follows:

"I am a creature so saturate with earth, water, and air that if I do not periodically work some of it out of my system in ink, my nearest and dearest cannot live with me. When such a time overtakes me, I write as the

birds sing, because I must, and usually from the same source of inspiration. So my first book was one stretch of river bank and swamp that I knew, one bird and one old man with whom I was sufficiently intimate to record his true picture. Then, like Grandfather Squeers, I felt that I had ‘the hang of it now and could do it ag’in.’ So I wrote another book. I put in a little more swamp, several birds, and a few people I knew I could portray faithfully.

“It was then the mail-box business began. First, a wealthy club woman of a great city wrote me that she had read one of my books to a company of tired clerks while they lunched at their noon rest hour, and it had brought to them a few minutes of country life so real that they begged for more. A nurse wrote from a hospital ward, for a man who had always lived in and loved the open and now, from spinal trouble, would never walk again, that my pictures of swamp and forest were so true he had lost himself for an hour in them, and would I please send his address to my publishers so that he might be informed when I wrote again. The warden of a state reform school wrote that fifteen hundred sin-besmirched little souls in his care, shut for punishment from their natural inheritance of field and wood, were reading my books to rags because they scented freedom and found comfort in them, and would I send him word when the next one was finished. And the dignified and scholarly Orren Root, sitting with his feet on the fender in the library of his beloved ‘Hemlocks,’ read one of my books one night and the next day wrote me:

“I have a severe cold this morning, because I got my feet very wet last night walking the trail with *Freckles*, but I am willing to risk pneumonia any time for another book like that.

"I have such letters in heaps, from every class and condition of people, all the way from northern Canada to the lowest tip of Africa, all asking for more of the outdoors, as I see it, because my descriptions are absolutely real to them, and my characters recognised as transcriptions from life.

"So I wrote *A Girl of the Limberlost* to carry to workers inside city walls, to hospital cots, to those behind prison bars, and to scholars in their libraries, my story of earth and sky. Incidentally, I put in all the insects, flowers, vines and trees, birds and animals that I know, and such human beings as I grow well enough acquainted with in my work in the woods that I feel able to record a faithful study of their loves, pains, joys, temptations, and triumphs.

"This reduces my formula for a book to simplicity itself—an outdoor setting of land in which I have lived until, as Mary Austin expresses it, I know 'the procession of the year.' Then I people the location with the men and women who live there, and on my pages write down their story of joy and sorrow commingled as living among them I know it to be. This is the secret of any appeal that my work may make. I am nothing but a machine of transmission. If it be truth that my work does not conform to the ordinary standards of fiction writing, it is probably because very little of what I write is fiction, and people know it.

"I live in the country and work in the woods, so no other location is possible for my backgrounds, and only the people with whom I come in daily contact there are suitable for my actors. Naturally, there come times when other locations and people are forced upon me, but I decline to admit that I have a working knowledge of

them. And I want to say for such people as I put into books that, in the plain, old-fashioned country homes where I have lived, I have known such wealth of loving consideration, such fidelity between husband and wife, such obedience in children, such constancy to purpose, such whole-souled love for friends and neighbours, such absence of jealousy, pettiness, and rivalry, as my city critics do not know is in existence. I know that they do not know these things exist, else they would not question my chronicles of them. But much can be forgiven a critic when he attempts to criticise a life that he never lived and a love that he never knew.

“I never could write a historical novel, because I want my history embellished with anything on earth save fiction. I could not write of society, because I know just enough about it to know that the more I know, the less I wish to know. I have read a few ‘problem’ novels and they appeal to me as a wandering over nasty, lawless subjects and situations of the most ancient type, under new names. There is nothing remaining for me but the woods and the people I meet there.

“So for my boys behind bars, first of all, for my working girls, for my scholars, and friends of leisure, I ‘aimed’ to conjure up part of a swamp that I once knew, and set its flowers blooming, its birds singing, its wonderful creatures of night a-wing. And then I tried to tell a simple story of a girl in calico and cowhide, who struggled until she reached the things she craved, even as once I struggled; of a woman who suffered many deaths for sins that she never committed, and found peace at last; of a man who had everything in life yet kept himself clean, even as many men I know to-day, because they are too refined and proud to stoop to common, contami-



nating sin; of a man and woman who might have been any one's Aunt Margaret and Uncle Wesley; of a little child that I fed, doctored, and quoted literally nine tenths of his sayings and doings; and a couple of young people who found the best in themselves through suffering, as most of us suffer and find our better selves sooner or later; and sunshine at the end, as please God, it shall come to all of us who work and do the best we know.

"My critics say that these methods never can produce literature; yet it is in my memory that the scenes of real masterpieces are lands intimately known, and the characters are people who are daily familiar with the authors. It is my belief that no great book ever was written any other way, and that no literature truly characteristic of a nation is possible by any other method. As to whether my work is, or ever will be, literature, I never bother my head. Time, the hearts of my readers, and the files of my publishers, will find me my ultimate place. In the meantime, I shall have had the joy of my work, for to me it is joy unspeakable to make a swimming hole splash, squirrels bark, and nuts rattle down inside reform-school walls, or to set a bird singing, leaves rustling, and a cricket chirping beside hospital cots. As for my 'aim,' Cale Young recently put it into verse for me. He did not know that he did it for me, but I did the instant I saw it:

"I ask no more  
Than to restore  
To simple, homely things their former joy."



## Chapter XV

### "MUSIC OF THE WILD" AND "THE HARVESTER"

ABOUT this time I was getting ready to be married and was very eager to do a lot of sewing, as is the way with all would-be brides; so Mother began to look about for a secretary. She was fortunate in finding a very attractive and competent young lady, Miss Lorene Miller, who had taught school for several years, and who, while she knew no stenography, quickly taught herself to be very proficient at the typewriter, so that she took my place with Mother very efficiently and left me free.

I was married in February, 1909, and went East to live. I moved first to Warren, Pennsylvania, and later to Buffalo, New York, where Father and Mother visited me at Christmas. At that time Buffalo was what is known as "wide open"; there was an opportunity for seeing a side of life that Mother never had seen before, and in this she was much interested. She accompanied us to after-theatre resorts of various descriptions in Chinatown and other localities where a detective was necessary for our protection. I will never forget the expression on her face when we entered one of these places and she saw a copy of *A Girl of the Limberlost* lying on a table. She picked it up and glanced through its worn pages, and I think perhaps her first impulse was to take it with her. But she evidently decided it was better for it to stay where it was if it could do any good for

some unfortunate girl; so she laid it back on the table without saying a word.

That year it was very cold and there was a heavy snow. Niagara Falls and the river below the falls were frozen over, a thing which has happened only rarely. All the underbrush was covered with snow, and, with the sun shining on it, it made a gorgeous and impressive sight. We spent an entire day tramping through the snow, and went home wet and exhausted but feeling that our experience had been well worth the discomfort.

In 1910 Mother did some work for the International Biblical Encyclopædia, and Dr. Orr, of Glasgow, was kind enough to say that her material was the best they received for the book. That same year she published *Music of the Wild*.

I think Mother's sense of hearing was the most acute of any person's I have ever known. She could sit perfectly quiet under a tree in a forest, hear each sound, distinguish it from the others, and tell you what it was. That Spring we had an unusual amount of rain, and the swamps and woods were covered with dense growth, which made them particularly attractive to the birds. Day after day Mother went afield, and while taking pictures, she began to make a study of the different sounds she heard. The result of this study was *Music of the Wild*. It is divided into three parts: "The Chorus of the Forest," "Songs of the Fields," and "Music of the Marsh." In this book she discusses everything in nature that contributes to the general musical chorus of the great outdoors, and in many instances she interprets the sounds and names their causes. One of my most prized possessions is the first copy off the press of this book, which she inscribed as follows:

TO JEANNETTE

Come with me and you shall know  
The garden where God's flowers grow;  
Come with me and you shall hear  
His waters whisper songs of cheer.

With many thanks for your cover design and your  
assistance in securing most of the illustration.

With love, your Mother,  
GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

Limberlost Cabin,  
October 1, 1910.

The cover I designed for the first edition is a pale green and white, decorated with what is commonly called “rattle-box vine.” This vine has pods with seeds in them, and when they are dry they sway in the wind and sound much like a baby's rattle.

Mother dedicated this book to Dr. Miles F. Porter, my father's brother, and his appreciation of her thought of him is expressed in the letter which he wrote her on receipt of the book:

207 Wayne Street,  
Fort Wayne, Indiana.  
Sunday, October 9, 1910.

MY DEAR SISTER:

I put off writing to you until I had time to read the book which, out of the kindness of your heart, you dedicated to me. I have not finished it yet, but have read most of it and want you to know that in my opinion it is not only the most beautiful book but, what is of greater importance, the most entertaining and the best you have written. I want you to know, also, that in dedicating the book to me you have given me a new stimulus to strive.

I must confess that your acknowledgment that, through our camp, I helped you a little in your work is very gratifying to me. Many of the pictures are familiar to me, and I can recall them to the eye of my mind very distinctly. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate the honour you conferred upon me in dedicating this beautiful work to me, and how much more I appreciate the love which prompted you to do it. I never was much when it comes to the expression of my feelings in words, so I will not try any farther, but will just content myself with telling you what I did when I looked at your book and read your letter—I cried.

Lovingly,  
MILES.

In 1911 *The Harvester*, which has had the largest sale of any of Mother's books, was published. Many letters had come to her from young men asking questions about the woods and if there was anything they could do to earn a living that would keep them outside all the time. Mother was always interested in young people and always wanting them to live clean lives and preserve high ideals. Particularly she thought more should be done toward interesting young men in honest, moral living. She considered intimacy with all outdoors and nature one of the best pathways to God and His teachings. So she wrote this book about a young man whose mother trained him to stay in the woods and earn a good living by things he found to do there. She based her story on growing ginseng and other herbs which can be sold to druggists and chemical supply houses. The Harvester did wood carving, using moths and other unusual designs suggested to him by daily life in the woods. He made candlesticks

and picture frames from the bark of trees which he had cut for wood.

This book has been used to a great extent in prisons and reform schools. The president of one of our big railway companies gave three hundred copies to young men in his employ, and ministers and physicians have often quoted the Harvester's speech before the medical convention, in which he sets forth the axioms of clean living. One woman wrote for the address of the Harvester, and Mother replied that she could not furnish it since "half of him had long since passed over and the other half was married," meaning that the Harvester was a composite of her father and the husband of a dear friend of hers. She answered one critic who stated that the Harvester was an unreal character and never could have lived by saying:

"Of course, I am not quite a fool, so as deeply as I see into nature I also see human nature. I know its failings, its tendencies, its weaknesses, its failures, its blackest depths of crime, even; and the people who feel called upon to spend their lives analysing, digging into, and uncovering these depths of depravity have that privilege—more's the pity! My life has been very fortunate in one glad way: For every bad man and woman I ever have known, I have met, lived with, and intimately known an overwhelming number of strictly clean, decent people, and *upon the lives of these I base what I write*. To say that this does not reproduce a picture true to life is as great a falsehood as was ever coined. It does. It reproduces a picture true to ideal life, to the best men and women can do at level best. It reproduces exactly such a picture as I opened my eyes upon at birth. There is



not one tender, loving, thoughtful, chivalrous thing I described the Harvester as saying and doing that I have not seen my father and two of my brothers do constantly for my mother and sisters in my own home. My father was precisely such a man, and my mother adored him.

"One of my most distinct memories dates back to high-chair days when I sat between them thus elevated. Every day at meal time, from serving tea and dessert, my mother finished last. Every meal my father excused himself, came and stood back of her chair, and in the presence of his family gave tangible evidence of his regard for her by stroking her hair, patting her shoulder, kissing her lips, cheek, or brow as the mood moved him. This particular day he was quizzical. He tilted back her head and laid his lips on a spot just where the base of her white throat spread to her breast, a spot honey sweet, as any of her dozen babies could have testified. With her head held against him he questioned: 'Mary, do you love me yet?'

"This instant I can see her form stiffen and straighten and hear her amazed and wondering voice: 'Why, *Mark*, I love you until I can scarcely keep my fingers off you!'

"She had ridden to that farm after oxen drawing a pioneer wagon; she had cooked over open fireplaces before the days of outdoor ovens and cook stoves; she had borne her part in making and beautifying our home; and she had mothered twelve lusty babies, buried two, and nursed others through dreadful accidents, sickness, and trouble. She had had her chance to lose her beauty, to indulge self pity, to weep, to cling. To the day of her death she stood straight, a proud, radiant creature, believing in and loving life, and having found it such a



wonderful thing with a man like my father that she bore this testimony before her family at a period when I, her twelfth child, can distinctly remember it.

“Now what do I care for the newspaper or magazine critic yammering that there is not such a thing as a moral man, and that my pictures of life are sentimental and idealised. They are! And I glory in them! They are straight, living pictures from the lives of men and women of morals, honour, and loving-kindness. They form idealised pictures of life because they are copied from life where it touches religion, chastity, love, home, and hope of heaven ultimately.

“Am I the only woman in this broad land so born and reared? Was my home the only one with a moral code and religious practice? Are there not homes by the thousand in which men and women are true to their highest ideals? I have seen and been in them by the hundred. Since the publication of *The Harvester* scores of men, even from across the sea, have written me that all their lives they have kept the law ‘as a moral obligation to society at large and a matter of fastidious personal cleanliness,’ as one man expressed it. Then why, when a newspaper critic reads such a book as *Freckles*, *The Harvester*, or *Laddie*, and judges men of all blood, locations, professions, and rearing by his standard, loudly proclaims that ‘there is no such thing as a virtuous man,’ and broadly hints that the women are little better; when he says such life is a sentimental, idealised picture, not true to real life now and never has been or never will be—why do not some of these people who write me turn their guns on these poor unfortunate men? They seem to have the idea that to be manly a man must be lawless, unrestrained, until he breaks his health and the hearts of

his family, and frequently their health, also. Why do not the people who have lived and are living clean lives rise up and say so and do their share toward proving that a picture of life at its best is *just as true and legitimate a picture as* one of life at its worst? How a big majority of book critics and authors have come to believe and to teach that no book is *true to life* unless it is true to *the worst in life*, God knows; I do not, and I cannot find out. The only explanation that seems to reach the root of the matter at all lies in the fact that most of these critics are attached to magazines and newspapers where strenuous rush is the law, and the most of life they see, and that upon which they live and thrive, if they do live and thrive, is the sin, error, mistakes, the dreadful things men and women do in the wildest of city life when half mad with the insane rush. So they judge all life by what they see of it, never taking into consideration the big side they do *not* see and know. A critic is scarcely to be blamed for not believing in a life and love he never knew; yet surely it is poor judgment, to say the least, to judge all life by the atmosphere of the average city newspaper and magazine office.

"To deny that wrong and pitiful things exist in life is folly; but to believe that these things are made better by promiscuous discussion by people who fail to prove in their books that their viewpoint is either right, clean, or helpful is close to insanity. If there is to be any error on either side in a book, then God knows it is better that it should be on the side of pure sentiment and high ideals than on discussion in books of subjects that often serve to open to a large part of the world their first knowledge that such forms of sin, such profligate expenditure, such waste of life's best opportunities, exist.

“I happen to know that thousands of young people form their ideas of what they consider a wonderful and a desirable life to live from the books of half a dozen popular authors, and they would be infinitely better off if the government actually censored books and forbade publication of those containing sensual and illegitimate situations which intimately describe how social and national law is broken by people of wealth and unbridled passions. There is one great beauty in idealised romance: reading it can make no one worse than he is. It may fire thousands to higher inspiration than they ever before have had.

“To-day a criticism of *Laddie* by a minister of the Gospel was sent me in which he wrote of it as ‘molasses fiction.’ What a wonderful compliment! All the world loves sweets. Afield, bears as well as flies would drown in it. Molasses is more necessary to the happiness of human and beast than vinegar, and overindulgence in it not nearly so harmful to the system. I am a molasses person myself. So is my family. So was my father’s family. So are most of my friends—all of them who are happy, as a matter of fact. So I shall keep straight on writing of the love and joy of life I have found in the world, and when I have used the last drop of my molasses, I shall stop writing. Forever the acid of life will have to be doled out by those who have enough in their systems to be accustomed to it. God gave me a taste for sweets and the sales of the books I write prove that a few other people are similar to me in this.

“I have done every one of my books from my heart’s best impulses, made them as clean and decent as I know how, and as beautiful and as interesting. I never have spared myself in the least degree, mind or body, when it

came to giving the best I was able, and I never have considered money for a moment, more than that I had to live and could not do it by nature books alone; so I lighten each nature book with enough fiction to make it readable to those not interested in nature work—sugar coat their pill, so to speak. But to any fair-minded person my record proves that I have worked for love, not for money. In the beginning, when I knew the fate of any nature book better than most folk, I deliberately chose to make my start with the work I loved rather than with a book that would stand ten times the chance of being commercial.”

And the letters which came in from the far-flung corners of the earth, as well as from her own countrymen, go to show that her labour of love did reach and refresh many weary hearts. Here are a few of the most representative of these letters:

First, one from a busy St. Louis attorney who wrote on January 10, 1912:

DEAR MADAM:

This is a letter of thanks to you for having created the character of the Harvester. I gained so much pleasure from reading this book that I feel I personally owe you an expression of my thanks.

As you see from the letter head, I am a lawyer, and my palate for modern fiction may be a bit musty from my general habit of reading law books, and perhaps on that account I am very sceptical concerning the merits of modern fiction in general, but your book is so superior to the good run of modern fiction that once I started in the pleasure of its pages, I could not stop until I had exhausted what each page contained.

You have created the ideal superman whom our friends, Shaw and other dilettanti, have experimented with to the public's wonder. I know of no character in fiction endowed with such simple nobility and wonderful sweetness as the one you have here created. I do not know a single book that is calculated to do more good to our present-day warped ideas of life and manhood than this one, and I do predict that its influence will be strongly felt by each and every one of its readers, prompting them to cleaner ideals.

I do not know whether this praise of mine will be sweet to your ear, for undoubtedly you have heard such things concerning your book before, but I have done something that should give you satisfaction: that is, I have ordered several copies of this book for distribution among my friends.

Yours very truly,  
LEIGHTON SHIELDS.

And another from a woman of Cleveland, Ohio, who writes in part:

“Do you appreciate your power? Do you understand the great good you have done in creating a noble, sweet-souled, clean-minded man to stand before the world as a model, to inspire others to nobler living? All the sermons ever preached have been of less service to humanity than your book *The Harvester*, because it reaches those who most need it.

“Every man who reads the book must be filled with determination to be a *manly* man; and every mother who reads it blesses you for creating a man like whom they pray their sons may become. Your admirers appreciate all your interesting, instructive, and most excellently



written books, but we long for more such worthy friends as the Harvester, who is real flesh and blood to us. We feel the firm, cordial clasp of his hand; we lean upon his trustworthy personality; his powerful physique and mental poise sustain us; we are better for having known him.

"God has given you wonderful genius and the stamina to cultivate it. Every right-minded American woman who reads is *proud* of you. We all glory in the good you are doing, and, dear Madam, we beseech you to give to the world more such exalted characters as only *you* can create.

"What a privilege it would be to meet you, to look into the eyes of a woman whose soul has passed through the refining processes which make such writing possible.

"Yours with grateful regards,  
"KATHERINE A. VIETS."

And another from Vreedelust, South Africa, from a woman who, in the midst of illness in her household and many harassing cares and worries, has found time to write a letter of thanksgiving for *The Harvester*. She says:

"My dear, you build better than you know, and you reach farther than you think. Let me explain. Things have been rather strenuous here of late. In one room I had my sister down—very low down—with so weak a heart that it costs her pain to draw every breath. In the next lies the mother with an intestinal abscess which is draining the life out of her. In a third, an aunt with a seizure which makes her helpless and dependent. A fairly tall order. Of course, I had help enough; folks are more than kind. Still, there had to be one to keep things going—and that happened to be this girl. I have



not once lost grip, but, between you and me, no one knows how often I've come near doing so. And I had one craving—just a day off; to spend it in the pine woods; just to lie down upon those blessed needles and roll every burden off onto them!

“We live in the country right enough. When I look from my window I can see the tops of some firs; but those I yearned for were far away. And I found I was actually beginning to lose my belief in their existence; to think that this world was but a vale of tears.

“Then you came. Some one brought my sister your *Harvester* to read, and then I had it. I took it at a gulp. When I was through I had my old firm grasp upon those fir woods far away; neither have I lost it since. Do you understand now that I am saying my thanks to you for having shifted my whole point of view? You came and said: ‘Never mind! All outdoors is there for you to enjoy some day,’ and, believe me, I had need of such help as you gave me!

“I am sending you a mahogany bean pod. It hails from Central Africa, and the beans are a pretty red.

“Yours,

“A. KATIE NEETHLING.”

And then this letter:

Hulan, Manchuria, N. China,  
November 26th, 1914.

MADAM:

Although it is more than probable that many letters expressing appreciation of your books have come to you, I cannot refrain from adding to their number.

Had I read them in England, I think I should not now be writing, although my enjoyment might have been none

the less keen. But out here in Manchuria, where for months not a shimmer of green brightens the bare, brown, frost-bound earth; where, in the nerve-straining south winds and dust storms we trudge out week after week from the mud-built, grey-walled city to seek that exquisite glimmering of green on the trees, imagined so many times before actually seen, which tells that the sap is beginning to rise; and where the green is so soon sunburned to brown again, *The Harvester* has wrought a miracle of life for me hardly less wonderful than that he wrought for the Girl, though not of the same kind.

He has made me so curious, too, to know more, that I now want to read the nature books as well—and will!

Can one ever hope to find the Limberlost? It may be—must be, so far as I can see the future—years before I can set out to seek it, but some day I shall, for it calls!

I am,

Yours faithfully,

E. DORA EDWARDS.

And last of all a letter that so touched Mother's heart that she made a practice of sending the writer copies of her books as they were published:

Comstock, N. Y., Box 51,

December 2, 1914.

MY DEAR AUTHOR:

A big clock has just struck eleven. Five minutes ago I laid down *The Harvester*. Let me tell you how I picked it up.

First, though, a bit about myself. For fifteen years, though I was brought up in the country by a father and mother who knew the woods well, and taught my one sister and myself all our young minds could take in of

wood lore, and made us acquainted with the “little folk” who make it their dwelling place, for fifteen years, I say, I have been shut away from it all, unable to set my foot on a moss bank, or step on a lichened rock, or rake aside the leaves for the first hepaticas, or watch day by day the uncurling fronds of the brakes in the swamp, or hear the “knee-deeps” answering the “jugarums” in the cool spring nights, or watch the garter snakes slip through the lush meadow grass, or—or—or—— And how my heart has starved for it all! And the ache of longing has sometimes been almost more than I could bear. But I did! Thank God, I did! And out of the muck and mire of my old life has sprung that which I long to make something like the life of David.

That brings me back to your story, even as your story brought back to me the old longing for the wild; the teeming, good, good life of the woods.

I am in prison. My job is as stenographer to the warden of that prison. I am also two or three other things, but that is the main one. I had been working very hard for several weeks, and last evening, having reached the end of a particularly hard task, looked for something that would take my mind away from business and lead it into the no less real but more ideal phases of the life of the world. By chance (?), I picked up *The Harvester*. For five hours it held my thought, gripped my heart, and set my blood a-tingling through my veins, till it seemed that I was in a fair way to choke with the emotions evoked. I went to bed at midnight and began reading this morning about eight o'clock. As opportunity presented itself during the day, I have taken other sips of it. Then this evening I let work which needed to be done go undone in order to luxuriate

my soul. I was starved last evening, and gulped. To-night I ate with a more near approach to decorum. Now that I have finished the feast which you prepared for me, I am satisfied; not satiated, but, like the black and white lady cat that slept on my knees through several hours of this evening and now slumbers in my letter basket, purring with content and the eternal fitness of things.

I have just written this letter to thank you for your story and to show you a bit of my gratitude for bringing to me so much of God's Great Out-of-Doors which I have missed for so many, many years, and the clean, deep love of a man for a maid.

*Signed* (———).

## Chapter XVI

### "MOTHS OF THE LIMBERLOST" AND "LADDIE"

IN 1911 I moved to Emporium, Pennsylvania, a very pretty little mountain town with a river running along one side of it, and completely surrounded by mountains. At that time, back in the hills, all the dynamite which was used in blasting the Panama Canal was being manufactured, and Mother and Father, who spent Christmas with us there, were much interested in these operations. There was also a steel mill in Emporium, and Mother, with her usual interest in the lives and habits of different classes of people, enjoyed talking to the workmen as they operated the machinery and ran the red-hot molten masses into moulds to cool.

*Moths of the Limberlost* was published in June, 1912.

This book was the result of finding many cocoons in the woods while Mother was doing her work among the birds. She brought the cocoons home, hung them among the flowers in the conservatory, and sprinkled them every time it rained outside, when they would have been moistened by nature. These almost invariably hatched, and many nights, when she was expecting one to emerge, she pinned the cocoon close to her pillow and the scraping of the moth's feet as it broke through the cocoon awakened her so that she could watch it develop.

It is an interesting process, for when the moths emerge their wings are about the size of your thumb nail and

they grow before your eyes until, in a couple of hours, some attain a spread of five or six inches. Moths do not eat, and they live only a few days; but before they die they lay innumerable eggs which we protected until they hatched into tiny caterpillars less than half an inch long. Fed properly, these grow and change their skins seven times until, finally, they are the huge, wriggling tomato worms with horns, which most of us dread to handle.

Mother continued this study of moths until she had pictures of every moth common to her section of the country, so that when the book was finished she had sufficient of her own photographs for its complete illustration. She decided she wanted these illustrations done in colours, but the samples sent in by the publishing house were very unsatisfactory, so with her characteristic determination to have it right, she made up her mind to do the work herself. She made a trip to Indianapolis and bought a complete set of water-colour paints and brushes; she bought a special kind of print paper which would take the paint. She dragged down from the attic the old easel that her father had had made for her when she first took lessons in oil painting. It was a very exacting task. With thumb tacks she fastened her prints over wet blotters so that she could blend her colours without their drying so rapidly, and when she started one, she did not dare leave it until it was entirely finished. I was at home while she was doing these illustrations, having come back for a visit with my first baby girl, born November 27, 1911, and I well remember that many times I stood beside Mother and fed her lunch to her, bite by bite, while she worked.

Mother later expressed her feeling in the matter of these coloured illustrations as follows:



“Scientists from the beginning have had no hesitation in using dead and pinned moth specimens for book illustrations, despite the fact that the colours are faded, the wings in unnatural positions, and the body shrivelled. I would quite as soon accept the mummy of any particular member of the Rameses family I ever saw as a fair representative of the living man as accept a mounted moth for a living one. All the illustrations in my moth book are made from living moths and caterpillars in perfectly natural positions in which they placed themselves.”

Mother dedicated this book to Mrs. F. N. Doubleday, the wife of the head of her publishing house, and a very dear friend of hers. From on board the R. M. S. *Adriatic*, bound for a journey to Egypt and India, Mrs. Doubleday, herself a well-known writer of nature books under the name of Neltje Blanchan, wrote to Mother:

“Was it not enough that you should have dedicated *Moths of the Limberlost* to unworthy me, without giving me a special copy of it with the most exquisite of bindings and the most thrilling of inscriptions? Nothing at the blessed Christmas season, when our hearts are stirred to their depths, touched me more than your dear gift. It is a veritable treasure, one that I shall be proud to pass on as an heirloom to future generations, although no one, not even my precious Dorothy, could love it as I do. It was simply wonderful of you to give me a pleasure so deep and lasting. Thank you with all my heart.”

In 1913 came a novel, *Laddie*. This is a very faithful description of her own family and childhood home, together with their friends and neighbours, she herself being the “Little Sister” who tells the story. Of this

book she wrote in answer to a letter of inquiry from a reader:

"I could write no truer biography. To the contour of hill and field, to the last stripe on the wall paper and knot on the door, that is the home in which I was born, the parents who reared me, the very words they said and the things they did, the exact circumstances of my birth, my brothers and sisters, and some of my friends. There was no such person as 'Mrs. Freshett,' and some of the other neighbours described are fictitious, and a few of the things told never happened; but three-fourths of it is exact truth. If you will read 'Stratton' for 'Stanton,' 'Northbrooke' for 'Eastbrooke,' you will have the truth in the case as straight as I can tell it."

She wrote to a friend who had sent her a criticism of *Laddie*:

"This criticism is a corker—and mostly unjust. If I could have whispered in the ear of this critic that the book was biography, he would have read it with a different mind. If he knew it was the work of a twelfth child of a Methodist minister who had been accustomed to the reading of a chapter from the Bible, a psalm and a prayer every night and morning in her whole life, to a blessing three times a day at meal time, to prayer meeting twice a week, and to three church services on Sunday, he would understand 'the constant appeal to God' that he mentions. After all, I do not think God minded, and it did us a lot of good.

"One thing for which I could cheerfully 'swat' this man is his imputation that the book is 'vulgar.' That I most distinctly deny. I set out to paint the life of a

child of real flesh and blood, not as a fancy picture, but straight from life. Now what is the exact truth concerning childhood? Are children pure, delicate, refined little angels? Are they indeed? The wildest fairy tale is not so wild as they implore you to make it, and when you tell them they must not say or do a thing, nine tenths of them will, if it is humanly possible. It never appealed to me that the ‘Sebethany Perkins incident’ would be such a ‘horror.’ My editor warned me that it would be criticised; and I replied that it was absolutely true to childhood, and he let it stand as it was. I can feel the sick qualm to-day that I felt as I stood on that fence and bore witness to the fact that Sebethany had turned to stone. But did I go home when I was warned that I would ‘see something that I would sleep better not to see’? Not on your life! True to the savage and primal instincts in the heart of a very decently reared little girl under ten, I stuck right on that fence, and I saw for myself. But did I take any one’s word for it? I did not.

“Here is something a sister-in-law of mine of British ancestry and rearing, rigid in discipline and home rule, told me: In an alley back of her house two Negroes had a desperate razor duel, and one almost severed the other’s head. A big crowd collected, and she gathered all of her six children and shut them in the front room upstairs. Some time later, looking out to see if the crowd had dispersed, to her horror she saw one of her little sons with long yellow curls and still in dresses perched on the back fence looking down on the work of the coroner. She gathered him in her arms, and as she carried him in she said:

“‘Oh, Miles! How could you?’

“And the little soul smiled like the angel he resembled

as he answered: 'I want to stay on the fence! I *like* to see the dead nigger!'

"Horrible! Yes. But if you are telling the truth, is it true or not? What is the use in carrying on the old fallacy that children are angels and know nothing? Mercy me! Conduct an investigation, and you will find that they know enough at eight to stagger you. Among other facts of life, this one must be met; so I fail to see the bad taste in touching on it when detailing the characteristics of a child."

A few months later the Leon of this book, who was her brother Lemon Stratton, died, and of his death Mother wrote to a friend:

"The holidays were saddened for us by the death of my brother, Leon of the *Laddie* book. I am proud to tell you that he had a jest in the face of such intolerable pain it sometimes left him senseless. Valvular leakage of the heart struck him suddenly, the result of an old wound in the Spanish War. He faced his Maker clear-eyed and unafraid, and crossed the Great Divide with serenity and dignity.

"I reached him in time for a good visit, but I could not see his grey face and swollen body. To me he was, and always will be, the picture I described in *Laddie* when he soberly flung those awful texts in the face of the church congregation. He went out like that, with the white light still on his brow.

"When I asked him if he would not like me to get a heart specialist, he said: 'My dear, there is no specialist special enough for such a blow-out as this—just put your ear to my chest and hear me soozle!'

"I had to laugh even as I heard his poor heart run-

ning like a waterfall. To the very last he kept his doctor and nurses and friends laughing, and then said: ‘It’s all right,’ and went to sleep.—Not a complaint; not a whimper; not a regret; but unafraid and ‘all right.’ I hope God will grant me grace to go unafraid and with as much dignity. Tears are not for him, for I believe I shall see him again. If not—‘It’s all right.’

“In his last will he left me his motherless little daughter of twelve, so I shall have one more little girl to love and help all I can.”

Mother kept this little girl, Leah Mary Stratton, cared for her, reared her, and educated her; and she is now living with me.

Mother’s novels up to this time had never been published serially in this country, but she allowed *Laddie* to be published serially in *The Woman at Home*, a London periodical, and the English reading public was quick in its response to the book. Several appreciative letters from various parts of the world follow:

16 Charing Cross, London,  
December 7, 1917.

DEAR MRS. STRATTON-PORTER:

I am on watch over the North Sea. Before the war I had retired and was living in a beautiful part of British Columbia. Since the war I have met with your books and they have been to me the greatest joy. In *Laddie* I am reminded of the vigour and happiness of my youngest daughter, and of my own youth in a beautiful old manor house in England where I roamed at will over the farm.

I am writing this chiefly to thank you for the grand work you have done for humanity. I have travelled in



India, Afghanistan, Cashmir, the Straits Settlements, China, Japan, Java, round Australia, and I have seen how your work is honoured all over the earth.

And now I have need of Hope in the midst of this cruel war. My two gallant eldest sons have given their lives for humanity, one at Ypres, and the other near Salonika, the latter leaving a dear wife and four sweet children. But Right will yet prevail over Evil.

If you have time to send me a line, I should greatly value it.

I am yours gratefully,  
GEORGE OSBORN,  
*Colonel Royal Artillery.*

An army chaplain writes from Dalhousie, Panjal, India :

"I must, on the eve of leaving Dalhousie, write to thank you very sincerely for your kindness in sending me a copy of *Laddie*. I have greatly enjoyed, along with others here, the perusal of this book, which I consider the most interesting and delightful of all your books that I have seen. Mrs. Dalgetty and I laughed at the chapter on 'The Angel Boy' especially, but nearly every page is full of human and natural touches. The human tone is ever tender and touches a tender spot in us all. Perhaps the greatest treat I have had this hot weather, amid ever so much hard work both among European soldiers and Panjalus, has been the reading of *Laddie*. It was splendid just to shut one's door and read, laugh, and cry by turns; and then read the best bits aloud to one's neighbours in the spare evenings. There are five missionaries here this year, and we have all been enjoying this book."



A party of missionaries in Devon, Jamaica, wrote a community letter:

MADAM:

We venture to write you these lines of glad gratitude for your book, *Laddie*. The party who sign this letter consists for the most part of American and English missionaries who have spent a happy holiday together in a lonely mission station here, and some of its happiest hours have been spent on *Laddie*, which has been read aloud, and the reader has been appointed the writer of this letter.

Your delightful book is certainly not a cure for homesickness, but it is a specific for every other mental disease, and for many spiritual ones. Some of us were most delighted by “Little Sister’s” deep fellowship with the birds; some are devoted to *Laddie*; all sympathised greatly with Shelley; one at least (the scribe, who is head of a theological hall and of a boys’ high school) loves every cubic inch of Leon and would like a whole book about him.

We thought it wrong to accept so great a gift from you without letting you know something of our gratitude, and in token thereof we hereunto set our names. [Seven signatures follow.]

A schoolmate of Mother’s wrote from a sanitarium in Lafayette, Indiana:

DEAR GENE:

I received your book *Laddie* this morning and know that my friends and I will derive great pleasure from reading it. I have read so many favourable press comments concerning it, and sister Georgia says that she and

Bell have been greatly interested in it, as it really is a "true-blue" story of your family.

I have so often wanted to tell you how much good you have done through your books to some of the invalids here. One dear old lady who was quite homesick at first wished she could meet the woman who could write such a wonderful book as *The Harvester*. Another lady from the city asked for an introduction to me, as she had heard that I was a friend of yours, and she said they had studied about you and your books in their club.

The little message you wrote on the flyleaf touched me very deeply, as I have some very pleasant memories of our girlhood days. But do you remember how frightened we used to get when Mr. Humke would yell, "Sit!"?

We have such a beautiful location here, facing the river and the wooded hills on both sides. I often wonder if it would not compare with the Limberlost.

With much love and gratitude,  
MARGARET R. THURSTON.

From Wooster, Ohio, came a letter from an old gentleman who had known my mother's people in early days:

DEAR MADAM:

I have no doubt but you will be surprised to get a letter from me, an entire stranger, and I scarcely know what to say or to write, or why I should do so. I, as well as many more of my friends and neighbours, have been reading your book, *Laddie*, and all are just delighted with it; and I more so than any one else, as I have known all the Strattons of Wayne County, Ohio, for five generations.

When I was but five years old, my older brothers

carried me on their backs to school in the log cabin school-house where your grandfather taught, and I well remember all of his family—five sons and seven daughters. I am the youngest of my father's family, and am now eighty-three. I well remember your father; in fact, all of them. Daniel and I had a share in church work together. Cyrus did lots of carpenter work for me. I do not remember exactly the date, but think it is about twenty-five years ago that your father and his brother Daniel came to see me and spent the day with me.

After your grandfather's death, my father was appointed guardian for the minor children, and Catherine was my mother's hired girl for some time and the Notesteins and Strattons were always very intimate and worked together in the harvest field, the schoolhouse, and church. Having this lifelong acquaintance, the reading of your book just set me on fire, and I wanted to see you and talk with you. I have been living in my present home thirty-one years in the village of Bloomington, a suburb of Wooster. I frequently go up to Canaan to see the old places, but there is no one of my old schoolmates living except Isaac Sanders. His first wife was your Aunt May Stratton. He is just my age.

The history of your father's family just corresponds with my observation of the Strattons. Oh, I can never forget Uncle Thomas; he was such a funny man! Your book telling of Leon just reminded me of him.

My wife died nine years ago and we had no children. I have my home rented to a good, kind family, and I board with them and have two rooms to myself. They are all much interested in the book and we all join in asking you if we could be presented with your photograph. I sent a card one week ago to your Cousin Benjamin

Stratton asking him for your address, and to-day received a good letter from him giving the address. I wish, if it is possible, that you might call on me some time and we could have a good long talk.

I hope you will not be offended by my writing you, a stranger.

Very kindly yours,  
J. L. NOTESTEIN.

Mother once wrote:

"People generally ask where Laddie is now and what became of the Princess. Laddie was drowned before his marriage to the Princess occurred. I saw her sit on her beautiful horse at the foot of his grave and watch the casket that contained the beautiful body lowered to the earth. In later years she married a man with whom all of us were acquainted. She retained her beauty and charm of manner well on to middle age, and died only a few years ago."

## *Chapter XVII*

### THE SECOND LIMBERLOST CABIN

IN 1913 the work of dredging ditches through Mother's beloved Limberlost had begun. Most of the swamp had been cleared and drained and made into onion, celery, and sugar-beet beds. With this so-called improvement began the destruction of the old rail fences which were such a delight to Mother: the artistic, vine-covered rail fences that crept in crooked paths through the country like streamers of ribbon blown by the wind. Nothing is more intriguing to the nature lover than the hand-hewn rails, aged by the weather, and often covered with moss, lichens, and ancient climbing roses. Each corner held a secret: perhaps a cocoon from which would hatch a gorgeous moth or butterfly; perhaps a family of fuzzy rabbits or squirrels; perhaps a mother bird sitting on her pearly eggs, with her mate swinging on a branch as he keeps watch high above her. In Mother's opinion it was nothing less than a real crime to tear them all down and replace them with straight, uninteresting fences, the wires of which became so hot from summer sun that no vine could cling to them. It ruined the art and romance of the narrow country roads for Mother when straight wire fences with unfriendly barbs took the place of her loved old-fashioned rails.

Numerous oil wells were drilled; new roads were cut through her woods and fields, and new bridges were built. Thus her territory for field work was practically

destroyed, and if she desired to continue her work afield, it became necessary for her to choose a new location. Quite naturally, her thoughts turned to the northern part of the state near Rome City, which she had loved as a girl and had visited during many summer vacations; so she bought one hundred and fifty acres of primeval forest along the shore of Sylvan Lake near the little village of Rome City, Indiana, called it Wild-flower Woods, and began the work of building a second Limberlost Cabin.

The first thing she did was to hire tree surgeons to cut out the dead wood and fill the cavities in all the trees on the place. One day I was sitting on the front steps of the new Cabin, which Mother had designed much after the same exterior as the Cabin in Geneva, but larger and more convenient, when a Pierce Arrow limousine drove up and three handsomely dressed gentlemen stepped out. One asked if Mrs. Porter was at home, and when I said, "No," he looked dreadfully disappointed and remarked: "I am very sorry. We have come a long distance just to see a woman who would spend three thousand dollars on tree surgery when she might have spent it on clothes!"

There were innumerable flowers and birds. Mother laid off a small plot of ground at the back of the house for a vegetable and "tame" flower garden, planted an orchard and berry bushes; but she determined that on the rest of the property should be planted nothing but wild things. By actual count, she brought in and set the roots of three thousand plants, trees, shrubs, and vines in the first year or two of her occupancy. Most of these she located in other woods and swamps, marked them, and dug them when the proper season of the year came





LUMBERLOST CABIN  
*at Rome City, Indiana*



for moving them, only taking one or two of each species.

While she was in the midst of this absorbing work of planting the Cabin grounds, she wrote often to Mr. F. N. Wallace, a tree surgeon, and later on State Entomologist for the State of Indiana. Mr. Wallace was very much interested in this wild-flower sanctuary that Mother was creating, and did all he could to help her, making frequent visits to the Cabin, in consequence of which he fell in love with Miss Miller, Mother's secretary, who was living with her at the Cabin, and their marriage, which took place on June 30, 1915, was celebrated there. A characteristic letter from Mother to Mr. Wallace, written about this time, follows:

Limberlost Cabin,  
Bright and early Monday.

DEAR LAD:

Much appreciated are both your charming letters, and I'll get that cold out of my system on your express orders—even if I have to cough it up! I don't know how to thank you enough for the beautiful pictures of Jeanette III. You surely were blessed to catch just that fleeting expression. To me they have more of childish wonderment, innocence, and joy in the face than any child study I now recall. Not long ago I sent one to a woman in Scotland, and in the next letter I had from her she said that it was the most beautiful child picture that she had ever seen; that it looked to her "like the birth of a soul." I am going to have a little silver frame for mine for my desk.

Been letting in the woods all last week, and am going at the ferns next. Can scarcely wait to begin. I have a grabby feeling stealing o'er all my being—bet a penny I

take all I can get. So far we have brought in over fifteen hundred plants, vines, and bushes since spring.

You needn't bother about the buttercups. I have got a good start. Did I ever tell you my mother called them that? Really they are the celandine poppy. Found a swamp full of fringed gentians, lots of starry campion, and have brought in over a hundred each of cardinal flower and red wood lilies.

I have been intending to ask you all summer, as Lorene can tell you, to set a price on a few days this fall here in the Cabin, after she has doctored a few "oversights" and patched up a few places that didn't work, and we will move in a few dogwoods, etc., with rowing, music boxes, etc., in the evening. I have got my doubts—amounting almost to confirmation—about the big tulip. I think she's "holler," and the sooner she is filled the better, badly as I hate to cut into her. Then the big ash that was so late in leafing out up by the chicken yard. Well, 'long comes a botany man who has "writ a book"—good one, too—and he says that is a *blue* ash and one of the very *rarest* trees in America, and by all means we should open its cavity and treat it. He located another, raved over the chestnut oak in the field, found another near the spring, and was wildly enthusiastic over our variety, size, and number of trees. I'll tell you what he said about the big white oak when you come, and he said in a space of this size we had *greater variety* and more *rare* and *unusual* trees than he ever had seen elsewhere. He bewailed the lack of a shag hickory, but consoled me by finding an edible hickory like those we found at the lake last fall. And he liked my flower plans, and thought for the time I had been at work that I had performed almost miracles. I 'most wish some more botanists would come

—they are such encouraging people. As for the trees, I had a look at them myself before I bought the place, and while I did not know a blue ash was such a rare bird, I had noted the blue tinge on the leaves, and I did know what I had in the chestnut oak.

When we started out around the grounds he instantly began asking me every hard, unusual plant we came to, and pretty soon I looked him in the eye and said:

“What are you doing? Trying to ‘examination’ me?”

His wife and a woman with her leaned against each other and laughed so hard, and he grew so red, I saw my guess was right.

“Go right ahead,” I said. “If I don’t know, I want nothing so much as to be told.”

Whereupon, he said I did “very well”—but I didn’t tell him how *he did*, for he didn’t know about the leaf forms of the celandine poppy, and he fell down on Joe Pye weed; so, however I did, we quit about even.

Deems have sent me two installments of painted cup; but it is practically parasitic, and they dig just like scientists. They drive me mad. I am expected to make things grow on love—they have little if any root—and tell what they are by the grace of God. I am rather new at the flower business. My forte is birds and moths. And how I am expected to tell what a flower I have never seen is in a tiny plant, beats me. If I had a bloom, matured leaf, or seed pod—I got most of the orchids last fall from seed pods—I might manage it.

I’ve a showy orchis and two moccasins from the New Jersey man’s bed—ours is half in bud and more coming. I fancy the fringed and ragged are late, but the crayfish cut some and are hard on the ferns, which are ahead of those in the swamps. My slippers are in bloom and all



fine. I am losing some from moles, some from red squirrels and "mus'-rats," but as a rule—fine! I will make a list of what I lack later. I am simply wild with work now. Getting ready for rain, which doesn't come, cleaning house, and fifty things, all the time insane to be in the woods.

Don't send any more *Mertensia*. Let's wait until fall and finish of growth. They are awfully delicate, and the best I can do they wilt flat. Roots may live, but pet the tops the best I can, they droop. We have taken about five hundred trillium, and you cannot see that the place we got them from has been touched. There are *thousands* and I only take every fourth one so far as we have gone.

This morning George caught a two-pound bass and found a yellow lady-slipper nearly two feet tall with a pair of blooms. Splendid! So we call him the "Flying Dutchman." He is wild. Yesterday Herselluf found a bed of twenty-three Turk's-cap lilies a foot high and with stems as thick as my thumb, with last year bloom stalks eight and a half feet tall and ten seed pods to the stalk. I can prove up. Still there. Can you beat it?

Your last instalment is just received with almost tearful joy. When I saw the spiderwort and golden ragwort, I was tempted to say, "Don't send anything unless I ask for it," but just suppose I had said that and you had a chance and didn't send the blue bulbs! So there you are. I meant to take another trip to Geneva especially to search for these where I found some eight years ago. I do not think they are *quamasia hyacinthia*; it is not so tall and has an egg-shaped bulb, nearly black, and from an inch to an inch and a half long. These are a lily Schuyler Matthews sent for me to Dr. Robinson of the



Grey Herbarium, Boston, and he identified them as very rare, not illustrated in any botanical work, and named them *Camassia Fraseri*. You will find the illustration I made of them in the marsh chapter of *Music of the Wild*. If this is not right, Dr. Robinson is mistaken. I was wild to see them and ravenous for more. I am also eager for a good start of Fire Pink; I'd like to spread it all over the red hill. Indeed I want those violets, badly. Next to lance leaf. And if you've any one you want a few bird's-foot for, I own the factory.

We are all well, except poison ivy got me a little for the first time in my life—I've always handled it with bare hands—*can't* understand it; and we are hard at work, for a change. Love from all to you. Jeannette III often asks for you, and I'll be tickled to pieces to see you.

As ever,  
MRS. PORTER.

Mother was intensely interested in the various birds that homed in the woods surrounding the Cabin on the Lake. Among these were a pair of great horned owls which her neighbours did not appreciate because of their too frequent depredations in their chicken yards. Of the fight she waged for the preservation of these birds, Mother wrote to friends:

"I think both of you will enjoy my predicament with the horned owls. You know, I have a theory that one must not upset the balance of nature. One must leave her in her natural state to work out her own salvation. To be specific: In the woods near to the Cabin is a huge hollow beech in which for years a pair of great horned owls, birds standing from one and a half to two feet in

height, with from four- to five-foot wing sweep, have nested. Because they got a chicken from a straw stack or barn occasionally, my neighbour, whenever a passing motor killed one of his flock, promptly filled it with arsenic and put it near the tree for the owls. And nearly every evening, before time for the owls' flight, I would slip through the woods, sneak his bait, and carry it away. This year two of the great horned birds have brought out two youngsters each, making eight of these fellows; while down in the woods, just where the road enters, a pair of monkey-faced barn owls have brought out a pair with faces like the wrath of heaven, three feet in wing sweep and with an uncanny scream, adding four more energetic citizens to the night. I went out to call on them the other night, and I think nothing but a white dress I was wearing saved me from having them launch themselves upon my head, as they swooped down very close to me, screaming with anger. I imagine the dry weather has pretty well cleaned the fields of moles, snakes, and rabbits. Everything is probably searching a cool, moist place, and it very likely makes meagre hunting for the owls. Certainly, we have our share, and when three or four of them find one rabbit or groundhog, they certainly do make the night hideous. I cannot help laughing, but I can also see that I have not anywhere near my share of bluebirds, robins, cardinals, and orioles. The house wrens are secure in their little log cabins. But other birds are decidedly scarce, and by next year I am going to be completely overrun with owls. I shall certainly have to do something."

Of her experience in building the kitchen at Limberlost Cabin, Mother wrote:

"I have seldom gotten more fun out of a given amount of money than I had in the building of a kitchen for Limberlost Cabin that represented, at the time which I built it, the level best I could do in accumulating comforts and conveniences for the cook. It was a big kitchen—big as an ordinary living room. Its north wall from floor to ceiling, with the exception of a door, was given over to a long case for brooms, carpet sweepers, dust pans, vacuum cleaners, and dust cloths; a cupboard above for the lamps and candles necessary when country electric service is interrupted by the falling of branches after heavy storms; and this same wall contained flour chests opening out on rollers with receptacles for corn meal and brown flour and white flour and buckwheat. Above, a long, wide board that could be drawn out upon which to spread cookies fresh from the oven, and cakes from the tins; and above that, shelves on to the highest reach, for essences and spices and seasonings and the myriad things a cook needs to have at hand for her convenience.

"Half the length of the west wall went into another huge cupboard for kitchen dishes above and larger utensils below. A big window gave a view of the west woods and the winding lake shore and the roadway, with a small table beneath it for the convenience of those using the kitchen.

"In the south wall a pair of double doors opened into a compartment which contained a huge ice-box, lined with snowy glass having shelves of nickel, rods, and a space above it for the bread and cake boxes. Next, the back door, its upper half glass, the remainder of the space given over to the kitchen sink of snowy white enamel with a drain board at one hand, at the other, the pump which furnished drinking and cooking water. Above the

sink, faucets for hot and cold rain water. Stretching the length of the sink, a huge window from which the back yard, the garden climbing the hill, the orchard, the meadow, and an uninterrupted view on to the sky line, met the eyes of any one looking up from any occupation at the sink. Under it, a cabinet for scouring and other kitchen necessities, for jugs and utilities better for concealment.

"Against the east wall, the last word in Battle Creek gas ranges with six burners to accommodate cooking food to the extent of any crowd the Cabin ever sheltered. Level with the face of the cook, a small oven for cookies, pies, cakes, and biscuit. Below, a broiler for game, fish, and steak. Overhead, racks for conveniences, a steam cap, and below the cooking burners a huge oven for turkeys and the big roaster.

"And, in the middle of the kitchen, the *pièce de résistance*, an article of my own devising into which I put many hours of figuring and much thought—a huge table, the top of which is a two-inch-thick slab of golden oak covered with neatly laid zinc. Across one end, an eighteen-inch-wide slab of oak for pounding and cutting, covered by a cap of zinc to keep it dustless when not in use. Across the centre of the table, rising on brackets level with the face of the cook, stands a tray for the seasonings most commonly used, for the jars and bottles containing oil, cornstarch, and the like. Immediately beneath the table top, two big drawers for cutlery, paring implements, cake cutters, and towels. The lower part of the table enclosed to within a few inches of the floor, its swinging doors containing racks for pot lids and shallow pans; the interior, space for the cooking utensils, bowls, etc., in immediate use. The front of this table is within three

feet of the stove, but a step to the sink, and a few steps farther to the ice chest, within a few feet of any cabinet or convenience the kitchen contains. The floor, gold oak; all the conveniences, white enamel; the ceiling and side walls the blue of the sky; a thick, springy rug between the table and the stove, before the sink and the ice box; a light on the range and over the table."

On several occasions Mother was asked to throw open this kitchen for inspection by groups of women from the surrounding countryside, and I remember one summer afternoon when for an hour a stream of farm women, headed by the County Bureau of Home Economics, poured through the house, gaining inspiration for the beautification of their own simple homes. In their honour Mother had decorated the Cabin from the front door steps throughout the lower floor with huge baskets of goldenrod and other wildflowers. She met them herself at the front door, smiling cordial welcome, and answered the numerous questions that came up concerning the furnishings of the living rooms. When the kitchen was reached a sigh of appreciation went up from the throng of simple women, so that Mother, standing upon the back steps in the shadow of the twin oaks that grew there, took "Kitchens" as the text of the little talk she made them, telling them how to go about making their own drab kitchens into places of light and air and cleanliness suited for their daily tasks.



## *Chapter XVIII*

### "MICHAEL O'HALLORAN" AND "MORNING FACE"

IN the fall of 1915 we moved to Philadelphia, and Father and Mother spent Thanksgiving of that year with us. On Thanksgiving Day we took them to Franklin Field to see the Army-Navy football game. It was an impressive sight, with bands playing, flags and banners flying, and thousands of enthusiastic youngsters. Mother was particularly interested in watching the cheer leaders as they led the songs and yells before the rooting section. After the game she refused to leave until the parade and the "snake dance" were finished.

Many of our battleships were anchored in the Philadelphia Navy Yard at that time, and we were allowed to go over them during visiting hours on Sunday. Mother talked with every one aboard, from the First Officer to the cook. It was in Philadelphia that we became acquainted with Mr. Burke, who was a meat packer by trade, but a great lover and grower of orchids by preference. He had several men in foreign countries collecting rare orchids for him, and he spent several hours showing Mother through his greenhouses, where he had growing more than seven hundred varieties.

One afternoon, as we were hurrying home from a shopping trip, a little newsboy paused beside us and asked us to buy a paper. He was a particularly attractive little fellow, with huge brown eyes, silky brown curls, and a smooth olive skin with rosy cheeks, and so tiny we wondered why he was not at home with his mother. We were



in a hurry and paid no attention to him; but he was a good salesman. He ran along beside Mother, and looking up at her with his appealing brown eyes, he said:

“You have a kind face, lady. Far down the street I saw you coming, lady, and I thought you’d buy a paper!”

This was too much. Mother bought all his papers and sent him off with enough money to buy a supper for his entire family. After she went home Mother wrote a book, *Michael O’Halloran*, based on this incident. It was published in August, 1915, and is the story of a plucky little newsboy. Shortly after its publication Mother had a letter from her friend in prison in Comstock, New York. He wrote:

“The other day I was up in the library prowling about looking for a book; didn’t know just what I wanted, and referred the matter to the librarian. He handed me *Michael O’Halloran*. Less than five minutes ago I laid it down. Thank you. I’ve ended the story. But Mickey will remain with me through the days.

“Next Tuesday I pass out into the world of free men again—pardoned. What my especial job in life will be I don’t know. Does it make much difference? ‘There’s making things; that’s factories. There’s selling them; that’s stores. There’s doctors, and lawyers; that’s professional.’ Some day you’ll know which. Not, perhaps, that *you* care; but *I* do! Why? Just because Freckles, Laddie, the Girl of the Limberlost, Mickey O’Halloran, and Gene Stratton-Porter have had a good deal to do with the making of

“Gratefully yours,

“E. C. B———,

and I’ll want you to know.”

My second little girl, Gene, had been born March 22, 1914, and Mother had enjoyed the two babies greatly on her Philadelphia visit. She was very devoted to both the children and took much interest in their development and training. About them, on her return to the Cabin, she wrote her friend, Mrs. Robert Cochrane of Edinburgh:

"Since writing you last I have spent two happy weeks with my daughter and her babies in Philadelphia, where I had a great time sitting on the floor building block houses and making up 'sing-song' chants until I almost blistered my tongue. How the little brains grind! The older one wants to know if a camel has a hump so it can hump itself; why we don't walk on the ceiling, and what all the meat at the market comes out of. The baby tiny has three perfectly good new words, but no one has the slightest idea what they are. But her head and heart are all right. In a scuffle the other day she thought a little neighbour girl was hurting her big sister, and she picked up a small broom and waded into the fray quite valiantly.

"I named the older one 'Morning Face' almost at birth, partly because she is always smiling, even when she first wakens from sleep in the morning or her nap in the afternoon; and partly because there is a wonder and a joy and a mystery which I never before saw so well pictured in the face of a child."

In the spring of 1915 I went to Rome City with the children, and we were there for "Mother's Day." I wanted to do something for Mother in honour of the day, but did not want to send to the city for greenhouse flowers when I knew she cared more for wild ones. After

much thought on the subject, I decided to plant a bed of flowers. I had a bed spread in the woods near her study window, and then I located in a neighbouring wood three dozen white violets, which I transplanted successfully. They made a dainty, beautiful bed, and nothing could have pleased Mother as much.

During this summer Mother made the pictures of my older little girl which she used in the illustration of *Morning Face*, published in October, 1916. Of this book Mother wrote to a friend:

“I am sending you a little gift, a copy of my latest book, *Morning Face*. To your discerning intelligence this book will explain itself. I enclose a picture my daughter made of us when I was showing *Morning Face* how a flower was made. I had just set on her head a cap of flower-trimmed leaves. The picture was made the Fourth of July, and the lanterns were swinging, the Victrola playing, the lake covered with boats, and the little one was wide-eyed with wonder.

“The Cabin is my new one on Redwing Lake; the landscapes were all taken immediately around it save the one with the hermit thrush lines. The book is absolutely good natural history as far as illustration is concerned, being the cream of years of field work saved to put in ‘something good enough.’ The text must be read in a sort of sing-song chant; the natural history is right and true, I hope, lightened by gleams of humour which I find distressingly rare in books for children. This is the way I teach Natural History to the babies of my own family, and you would keenly enjoy watching the workings of their minds and seeing how their little faces light up as they become interested. Dr. Emerson says that he counts

it one of the finest books he has ever seen for children, because of its humour and comprehension of the possibilities of the child mind. He says that most people writing for children seem to feel that they must write *down* to the child mind, and so they succeed in becoming childish instead of childlike. He says children do not require being written down to; they are the brightest things he knows; that every day his own children amaze him with their intelligence. Heaven knows, I do not have to let down to these babies of my daughter's; they keep me busy furnishing reasons for things in an interesting and comprehensible way."

Our papers were full of reports of the war, and we were beginning to wonder if it was to be our war, too. There was considerable nervousness and unrest, and many of our young men had already joined British and Canadian forces. Mother was just in the midst of a revision and enlargement of "What I Have Done with Birds" when war was declared on Germany, April 6, 1917. Her chauffeur and field men enlisted, and the Cabin was left without a man except that my father came from his business in Geneva over week-ends.

Mother was very patriotic, and she rigidly observed all of the food regulations as they were issued. She sent to Marshall Field's in Chicago for knitting needles and many skeins of lovely soft yarn. The housekeeper was an Englishwoman who knew how to knit, and Mother insisted that every member of the household spend the evenings and all spare time in knitting. I have a picture now which Father took one Sunday afternoon which shows Mother, the English housekeeper, the enormous

Negro cook, and her inexperienced chauffeur, a lad of seventeen, all knitting.

A letter written during the war to her good friends the Cochranes of Edinburgh gives an idea of how the war affected Mother:

MY DEAR FRIENDS:

I have put off writing you for a long time because every day things happened I wished to tell you; and just when I had an accumulation in which I thought you would be interested I fell a victim of poison ivy. Why, in all this beautiful world, I do not know. All my life I have handled it with my bare hands; if you have a copy of *Birds of the Bible* at hand you will see it on the snake fence behind the brooding pea-hen, and the corner I worked in I sat in a bed of it and pulled it out of my way with my fingers. This spring I pulled it by the yard in my jungle place—anyway, it got me—shins, eyes, arms—and badly, too! It came just at a time when I simply could not stop field work, so I tried going on and got four re-doses before I gave up. I have fought it for weeks and am just getting comfortably free of it. This has been one reason, and the other has been the war. I am simply paralysed. I am hurt worse than with physical pain with the mental torture of not being my best self, where there is so much for a live, willing woman to do. We have been talking about “advanced civilisation” and “progress.” Surely they are good words. We have advanced and progressed to a state of horrors, thanks to submarines, aircraft, poison gas, and those awful guns, hitherto unknown in all this world.

I do not know how to write to my friends in England. I do not know what to say. Lady Muriel Her-



bert had written me asking me to send her seeds for a Limberlost corner in her wildflower garden, and all summer I had been gathering them here and there, and by the time fall ripened the latest, I did not know but she might think me a fool to intrude them on her when her mind and hands must be so full of more important things. After weeks of hesitation, I sent them and told her how I felt about it, and that it might help her if she could save a little time to set them growing. But I'll accept her verdict cheerfully if she thinks me the idiot I probably am to send them.

The war has been a terror from the beginning, and now that it is taking our nearest and dearest, it comes home with a new meaning. From the start I have worked, and given, and have done all I knew how to do to help; but when I read that a battle is raging at Toul, and think of my sister's son Donald, in aviation there, to all I felt before is now added the deadly chill of apprehension that no one can know, until their own *flesh and blood are in it*. I have another nephew, a fine surgeon, who is to have charge of a base hospital near Paris, and several more who are ready to start the instant their call comes. I also have a man dispatch riding with the American division, who was my driver for over two years. Here in the woods, he of course had his room and lived in my home. We put in three summers of field work, collecting, lifting, transplanting rare plants from where we motored to find them all over our state. He carried cameras and helped in picture work and drove my car. He was a straight, honest, brave lad, very quick; he could stop the car and be at the door with his arm ready to stay me, before I had moved to arise. He had no mother, and I mothered him as I do all boys; but not



all are of such fine timbre and respond to the effort one makes for them.

The last work we did was to set a basket of painted trillium bulbs, sent to me by the pastor of a large Episcopal church in Pittsburgh; he is now a chaplain with our troops, expecting to start to the front any day. We had a bargain. He collected for me in his country rambles, and during his vacation I helped him get the nature part of his sermons and lectures right, and gave him little hints about the wonders of nature that he could use in his work. So William and I always set Dr. Frick's baskets with especial care. This last one we set the day before we went to Fort Wayne to start the boy on his way; and we both watered those trilliums with many hot tears. I may have many drivers, but I shall never have another William, and I doubt if he returns, for his first thought was never of William; it was always of some one else. So now we are in the war in earnest.

My beautiful optimism is getting many a severe jolt these days; but I am going straight ahead doing the best I can. I can give you no better example of how we are living than to enclose a clipping from a paper published in our state capitol. The editor wanted me to tell women how they could earn money in their homes to buy a Liberty Bond, so I just told them what I was doing in mine. One of the things which has puzzled me has been why, when there were whole armies of men exposed in camps and tents and insufficient buildings, we should have the most severe winter we have had in sixty years. Never have I heard of the winter of such length and severity as this. People have frozen in their homes for lack of coal, caused by the congestion of traffic in the heavy snows in the second place, in the *first* by wrong

orders of coal to the companies the past summer; and many a soldier was frozen stiff in his tent, while hundreds died of pneumonia and kindred sickness. And we have had winters so mild that one could go without a wrap in January, and the roses leafed out. It surely is a difficult thing to understand.

When you have the time, write me a line and tell me how you are living through these dreadful times.

Ever your friend,

GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

## Chapter XIX

### "FRIENDS IN FEATHERS" AND "A DAUGHTER OF THE LAND"

THE revision and enlargement of "What I Have Done with Birds" was finished and published in 1917 under the title of *Friends in Feathers*. Concerning this book Mabel Osgood Wright, editor of the Audubon Department of *Bird Lore*, wrote Mother:

"I want to tell you how very much I have enjoyed your book—for its common sense coupled with humanity in the way in which you approach the bird family in the nest, for the spontaneous expression of all you see and enjoy so that the feeling passes on to those who read, and for the moderation of statement in never overdraw-ing the picture, the great fault of the present day in non-scientific nature writing.

"In making up several new Audubon Libraries, such as our society sends out for free circulation in the public schools of Connecticut, I shall place copies of your book in all those intended for pupils of advanced grades, and especially in the reference libraries for teachers, that they may learn from it how to make their bird lessons vital and hold the attention of their classes."

In the fall of 1917 I moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana, only thirty miles from Rome City, so that we could often go back and forth for visits. That fall at the Cabin was a very busy one. Help was still scarce and very hard to

get, as most of the girls were busily engaged driving trucks back and forth to trains with food for soldiers, or in other Red Cross work. At the Cabin every vegetable and fruit was canned, pickled, preserved, or jellied. They cut from the cob and dried in the sun sufficient sweet corn to supply themselves and many of their friends. Mother scrubbed out the enormous white enamel trays she used for washing pictures and filled them with peeled and sliced apples. These she set on top of the grape arbour and covered them with cheesecloth, often climbing up on the stepladder herself to turn them and see that they were drying properly.

The Christmas of 1917 we spent at the Cabin, and the children were delighted. There was much snow, and the ice on the lake was fourteen inches thick. Men from the little town were fishing through holes in the ice, and for a very few cents we could buy enough frozen perch and sunfish for a meal.

After we had decorated the tree in the house for the children, Mother prepared a tree which she had bought especially for the birds. It was a cedar almost as large as the one in the house. She placed it on a little porch just outside the sun parlour so that we could all see it plainly from inside. On it she put all the things birds like: little wire containers filled with suet; others filled with scraped beef; huge bones with bits of meat and gristle were fastened on with string; there were little tin baskets filled with various sorts of seed; and there were baskets of nuts for the squirrels, and over it all there were strung yards of popcorn, unsalted. Pieces of apples, oranges, and fresh vegetables were put on each day. There was no lovelier sight than the brilliantly coloured birds as they chirped to each other while they ate greedily. It

was a great lesson to the children, and they never tired watching the birds and asking questions.

Mother wrote of this Christmas:

“Our Christmas was a dream of beauty. I had a lovely red-ribboned holly wreath in each window and door glass, bells in the doorways, the lights and mantels draped with Spanish moss and ground pine sent me from Pennsylvania. I had a big Christmas tree loaded with glittering ornaments in the library and one on the cement porch for the birds loaded with suet, meat, bones, nuts, and grain. Fifteen minutes after it was up the birds were swarming over it. Then a man sent me for a gift a darling little blue spruce tree, perfect in shape, which I trimmed with the tiny, cunning things for the dining-room buffet. We draped the electric lights and used red candles and roses in the living room, yellow in the dining room, and white lilies and candles in the library, which is in green and white.

“We had a Heart’s Delight turkey from a great model farm in New York State and two days before we killed two shoats, so we had fresh sausage, tenderloin, and spare ribs. I wish I could have sent you one of the baskets I sent out to friends on Christmas morning.

“Our gifts were numerous, from everywhere, and far more than we deserved.

“If this seems disconnected it is because I am writing it in the conservatory. The windows are built with broad, deep casements especially to furnish feeding tables for the birds. Outside the open porch has a cement floor on which stand sheaves of wheat, apples, cabbage and celery leaves, and on the broad sills are scattered chop, wheat, ground corn, and baked potatoes, and depending

from a rope are raw meat bones and pieces of suet. Uncounted chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, sapsuckers, flickers, song sparrows, jays and cardinals, and a pair of squirrels are holding high carnival. The big forest trees are frost laden, the lake a sheet of ice, the ground almost a foot deep in snow, and a big blizzard blowing straight from the east. This is 'Back to Nature' with a vengeance; but you should see the red and blue birds and all the chattering little fry. Also, we have a pair of coons in one of our hollow trees, and a pair of big owls, and because I have to tell *all* of every subject I start on, we know by the odour that occasionally we are visited by skunks, which are not poetic but very beautiful.

"I am perfectly crazy for spring to come over the hill. All my life I have been persuaded that I would be more at home in the woods than elsewhere, and now I am trying it. I took the money I earned myself and bought one hundred and fifty acres of wild woods with quite a number of primeval trees on it, on a lake shore; there is a spring, and several acres in a cleared hill for a garden and orchard and pasture. Then I laid off a red, white, pink, blue, lavender, and yellow flower bed of an acre each, in the deep woods running down to the lake shore, and for several years I have spent all my spare time planting wild flowers of each colour named, beginning with water growth at the water, and running back so that each plant can have its proper location, the vines on wooden fences between the big beds.

"The Cabin is in the middle of the yellow bed; it has eighteen big rooms, four fireplaces, two of which I practically built myself. One is that white glacier formation known as 'pudden stone,' the pebbles being red and blue; and the big living room one is of field boulders split



to show every colour imaginable and flecked with quartz crystals that sparkle like diamonds in the light. I am going to picture and write up the place for *Country Life* soon, and I will send you a copy. There are a private gas and electric light plant, water works and telephone, and a good road, so we are not cut off from civilisation; but we surely have a right to the ‘R. F. D.’ I so proudly stick to my address these days—which same interpreted means ‘Rural Free Delivery,’ if you do not do things this way in Scotland.

“I read the magazines and papers you sent with great interest, and I was much astonished over a line in the *Christian World* article concerning me, until I remembered I had told of the occurrence myself in a book. I refer to ‘Drat the moths, shade your mother!’ Oh, me poor family! The things they have been through and the deaths they have wailed over in quicksands, by rattlesnakes, sunstrokes, tuberculosis achieved in swamps, and God knows what, the wails they have wailed and the weeps they have wept over me—and to-day I am the most distressingly well woman of my age I ever knew, and certainly not the most miserable. I never shall forget the day I descended from a telegraph pole big and high as they are set in country towns of about twenty thousand where I had been working from a pair of painter’s ladders lashed together, to make studies of a pair of Baltimore orioles feeding their young, that would be true to life, and found my sister shut up in her back room on her knees praying God to spare my life, and afraid to look to see whether I was alive or lying dead in the street. Oh, my poor, poor family! But the heaps and stacks of fun I have! I am now busy on a poem that begins:

"Joy came over the crest of dawn,  
Freighting a Mourning Cloak's painted wing—

and the fourth line does not end in 'sing'; how does it sound for a start?

"Lots of best regards to you and all yours, and more thanks than I know how to express for all you are trying to do to help me get a proper introduction to the British Isles, with a Scotch head, begorry!

"Sincerely yours,

"GENE STRATTON-PORTER."

A little later, in February, 1918, Mother wrote me as follows:

"We are beginning to have hints of spring. At three o'clock the morning of the thirteenth I was awakened by flocks of wild geese hunting around the lake shore under my window, the ground-hogs are out and placidly feasting on pitcher plants and rare ferns, the bluebirds and robins have come home, the catkins and early buds are much swollen, and the ice on the lake is beginning to break up. Last night I lay in bed and laughed to think what any one unaccustomed to the woods would feel if dropped in this location all unbeknownst to himself. Can you imagine the sound when a cake of ice sixteen inches thick and a mile long begins to crack at one side of a lake, runs across it, and the reverberation hits the side of your dwelling like a blow of a tree trunk falling against it? While the crack is running across the lake, it sounds precisely like the roar of the biggest, hungriest lion at the zoo at feeding time, and when it begins, these cracks run in all directions and sometimes several at a time. Then our family owls, so

big they have three-and-a-half-foot wing sweep, are doing their courting these nights, so that our music is perfectly enchanting.”

In 1918 *A Daughter of the Land* was published. This was also a simple story of farm life, based on facts.

With the coming on of spring at the Lake, Mother wrote to a friend:

“I read proof with one eye and look out of the window with the other. Every minute I can spare from the book, or when I have to have a little fresh air and change, I have been out working with both hands to bring exquisite things from the surrounding swamps and marshes to add a spring touch to my flower woods. All the fall and winter stuff I planted seems to be coming on finely, but this is my first attempt to bring in spring things. I only have had a few days between galley and page proofs, but in that time I have gotten in several hundred exquisite plants, the man who did my forestry work has sent me several baskets of rare things, and a man who worked with me last year has been doing what he could alone, so that we total nearly a thousand roots set this spring, and I heartily wish it were ten.

“I know that you will be delighted to hear that the orchid bed we made turned out to be a glowing success, and this is a good word, for they are so far advanced that I can see the tinges of colour on some of the rarest, and now that I have proved that I can move and bring them to bloom, I may make a bed as large as I have space and bring in hundreds of our rarest from tamarack swamps that are being drained so that these flowers will be killed if I do not rescue them. And of the big six-foot tall ferns I moved in, only two failed me, and the

others are from four to six inches higher than the ones in the swamp from which I took them, and it isn't a good season for ferns, either, as we have had the least rain of any April I ever have known.

"I have the yellow slipper orchids, the pink mocasins, the white in bud, and many showy orchis, while other things dainty and rare are behaving as they never would anywhere except in deep wood beside water.

"I am happy to announce that this winter I got about one hundred acres adjoining us on the east, and that adds over fifteen more acres of perfect, well-flowered woods to my piece and leaves eighty acres of good farming land with a good house for a tenant. Now I have the promise of twenty-five more south of me, which will give me a good field for a commercial orchard, if I decide to set it, also a bit of swampy ravine and a lily pool, and, best of all, an open road to the highway. We have been using a lane and were pestered frantic by stock, gates, and sightseers. I loathe the word. If I get that, I shall have all I ask of the world in the way of land.

"I counted nine male goldfinches sunning on one bit of fence waiting the advent of their broods the other day. The warblers roll in unison, cannot be distinguished, and all morning a bobwhite from the fields has been calling down on the shore not ten yards from where I sit writing.

"Leah Mary is simply wild in the woods and on the water, her eyes sharp as a small Indian's, her step light and her touch. When we were cleaning house a few days ago, I was washing a tea set in my library which so far no hands in my home, save mine, have ever touched, and she came asking to wipe and arrange the pieces in their especial little cupboard beside the fireplace. The set was picked up for me by a friend in Birmingham,

England; had been in the same library in Sussex for three hundred years, old Chinese pieces, rare and fine as china ever gets.

“I hesitated, and she said: ‘You needn’t think I’d break them. I never break things.’

“I gritted my teeth and handed over the cheesecloth. Presently it became a pleasure to watch her little slender fingers and her reverent face and touch; and she did not break them, or anything else.”

Again I spent the summer in Rome City with the children. They were old enough to run wild through the woods and over the farm much as Mother had run over her father’s farm when she was a little girl. Mother spent a great deal of time teaching the children interesting things of the outdoors. She taught them where to look for mushrooms, and how to pick them; how to gather strawberries; how to handle moths and butterflies; how to put a worm on a hook when they wanted to fish. They were allowed to hold baby birds for a few minutes before letting them fly away. She taught them how to handle baby rabbits, squirrels, turtles, and tree toads; she taught them the names of the flowers, trees, and birds, and we often laughed at their childish attempts at pronouncing the scientific names of moths and butterflies. Over on the farm, she allowed them to ride the horses as the farmer ploughed, and encouraged them to play with the puppies, calves, pigs, chickens, and ducks which at that time abounded on all Indiana farms. They were taught not to fear the water. They were allowed to wade and go in bathing, and the older one could swim at the age of four. They were taught how to row a boat, and how to gather water lilies without upsetting it. It

was a great education for the little folks, and guided by Mother's wise hand and heart, they learned many things not found in books—many things which they will never forget.

Mother was overjoyed at the ending of the war. She was particularly fortunate, for all of "her boys" came back—among them the faithful William, who returned to his work immediately. It was a real task to get things, long neglected, back in shape to suit his neat, order-loving soul; but he went to work willingly and cheerfully as always, and accomplished wonders.



## Chapter XX

### "HOMING WITH THE BIRDS" AND "HER FATHER'S DAUGHTER"

IN 1919 *Homing with the Birds* was published. This book was suggested to Mother by her very good friend Neltje Blanchan, the wife of Mr. F. N. Doubleday, her publisher. Mother was relating to her one day various stories: one about a female bird which was unable to lay an egg; one about a bird which had blistered its throat with poison berries and was unable to swallow until she pricked the blisters; and one of an oriole that had hanged itself with a piece of string it was carrying to help build its nest. Mrs. Doubleday suggested that Mother take all of these personal experiences and make them into a book, which she did.

A woman who signed herself as "One among the host of your most ardent admirers," wrote:

"I have just finished reading *Homing with the Birds*. Your personal experiences bring this work very close to the human heart, as they do all of your books, especially those dealing with Nature. The photographs, too, being your own, and showing the living birds in their native haunts, greatly enhance the book. I enjoy the photographs as much as the most interesting way you have of describing your experiences. I marvel at the patience, fortitude, and physical endurance it took to produce them."

Of another comment from a high source on this piece of work Mother wrote to a friend:

"Mr. Doubleday sent me a letter of which I am enclosing you an exact copy. It was written by one of our most distinguished and charming analytical writers, out of the fulness of his heart, after having picked up my book by accident. I cannot believe he is the only man who will feel the sincerity of the work, or sense the study and hardship required to produce it. You will notice what Mr. Morley says of Fabre. The Fabre books are a part of my religion, but I cannot see that Fabre goes deeper, paints life history more accurately in the case of any insect he has studied than I do in *Moths of the Limberlost*, while my book has the added proof and attraction of the illustration. Yet France went wild over Fabre. I have a feeling very strongly entrenched that if I had made the mark I have on the homes of the United States or written and illustrated my seven nature books, in any country in Europe, my reception would be very different for my nature work. But here is the Morley letter:

PUBLIC LEDGER COMPANY

Independence Square, Philadelphia,

September 18, 1919.

DEAR MR. DOUBLEDAY:

To-night I came across a copy of *Homing with the Birds* lying on the desk of Dr. Douglas, our literary editor. I picked it up and have been spending fascinated hours with it when I ought to have been doing some urgent work.

It is a book to be proud of, and I can hardly tell you how deep and complex a pleasure it has given me—something of the breathless satisfaction one feels on those rare occasions when one knows one's self following along some path toward the magic of truth. Mrs. Porter's beautiful stories of her bird friends, some of them

pathetic, some of them humorous, are a kind of education in the art of wondering at the fulness of life. They refresh the sense of amazement. What could be more touching than the story of the robin that stayed in her nest during ninety hours of rain? Or more entertaining than the anecdote of the wastrel waxwing so gloriously drunk on pokeberry wine?

I cannot see that Mrs. Porter's great work with birds is any inferior to the studies of the famous Fabre with insects. I hope the book will have the greatest possible success. A book of that sort does one as much good as (or perhaps more than) going to church. If the essence of religion is an attitude of reverence toward mysteries too great for us to understand, then this book has in it the gist of many creeds.

Please pardon this outburst! It is a spontaneous utterance of admiration for Mrs. Porter's unique gift of fellowship with the birds, which seems to have been born in her warm and courageous heart.

Sincerely yours,  
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.”

That summer Mother spent visiting in the East, mostly with Dr. Emerson and his wife in Clifton Springs, New York. In October, 1919, she made a trip to California, bringing her secretary with her. She rented a bungalow and began gathering material for her first California story. The bungalow she described in a letter as follows:

“I came out to California two weeks ago for a six months' rest and have been hard at work every minute getting settled to live and fighting a big heap of mail which always follows the publication of a new book. I had thought of going into a flat or apartment, but found myself in a city of near a million, the flats and apartments, no matter how lovely, rocking with the roll of traffic, jarring with noise, and reeking with the essential odour of many human beings living in close contact.

Fresh from the woods, the combination of soapsuds, tobacco smoke, etc., was too much for my poor nostrils accustomed to nothing worse than a plain bed of muck, so I struck for the suburbs and a bungalow. Then to avoid the enormously inflated rents (they are asking from \$250 up for bungalows that cost six thousand to build), I bought one of the critters and will take a chance on selling it when I finish with it. At the present minute that may not be soon. I sorter like this glorious sunshine, the pergola of Cherokee roses, the orange trees and blood-red poinsettias, and the mocking birds tame as robins at home."

She did, however, return to Indiana and Limberlost Cabin in the spring, where she spent the summer in getting her new book ready for its August publication. Of it she wrote:

"All winter I have been at work on a book. I am a little in doubt about its being the 'great American novel': that is such an elusive bird. I should love to snare it; but I fear this is just a plain little story cut clean from the pages of life as I have seen it lived, with no romancing and no sentimentalising; which is an innovation, for me. Some way, with the pressure of the war on, I could not write just as I always have, the bare facts would uncover; but it has, I think you will grant it, a quality of vigour and freshness. It will be out in mid-August, and I shall, of course, send you one of the very first copies off the press. At least it has the usual qualification of my work—truth. I have done my best, and I hope you will find it a great improvement over some of my former efforts. I surely like to be a growing thing. I know there are clean, moral, home-keeping men and

women, and of such I choose to write. I know there are plenty of the other kind, also, but they have their writers in plenty to chronicle their salacious doings. Why should I?

“I have been intensely interested in a letter from Mr. Murray. I never have met him personally, but I have been in correspondence with him for years. I have read the book he wrote concerning his father; I have watched the lists of books he publishes; and during the war I have had a heartache with and for him. He is the kind of man who could not shed tears, but his distress was such that he had to take a piece of paper and, in a dispassionate, detached way, much as if he were telling the thing concerning some one else, he would add to the close of a business letter that his only son was lying on the ground with typhoid fever in Egypt; that after a devoted companionship of forty years, the mental stress of his beloved wife became so great that she did not recognise him; that his younger daughter had contracted typhoid fever from a patient while nursing in France and her mother did not recognise her remains; that Captain Murray had been sent home and had recovered; then that he was in the firing line with the B. E. F. in France—just these bald statements that came with the force of a blow. And one knew that the man was suffering until he had to speak; he could not endure it in silence. You probably know that after being severely wounded the son escaped with his life, has married, and is now connected with his father in the business of running the oldest publishing house in England. With this setting I am going to quote you a few lines from my latest letter from Mr. Murray concerning the new book. I want to share with you the very great pleasure I experienced in



having this strong man, this fine man, this highly cultured man, so appreciate the work I have tried to do. Mr. Murray wrote me:

"The rough proofs of *Her Father's Daughter* arrived two or three days ago, and I at once pounced upon them and put aside other work in order to scan them. I must send you a few lines to tell you that I am delighted with the book; it takes up a new line and in my opinion is the best book you have done so far. I have read many California novels and was becoming weary of a theme which seemed to treat of blasé society in which wealth and materialism seemed to be the only objects of life—but here we get beyond the narrow limits of social life and deal with human life in its broader aspects. Linda is a 'Creation' and Katherine O'Donnovan and Peter Morrison and the rest hardly fall short of her. If California is going to turn out many Linda Stronges in its rising generation, we poor men will have to take a back seat. I look forward with the utmost pleasure to the publishing of this book, and I only hope that the reviewers and readers will share my opinion of it.

"Comparing the above with the guarded utterances Mr. Murray has made concerning any of the other books, it seems like a great mental breaking up on his part, and it is barely possible that the war has done something in the line of broadening and deepening his mental processes as well as mine.

"Dr. Charles Wharton Stork, one of America's finest critics, wrote me also concerning the new book. He says:

"Linda is a girl after my own heart, very much like Mrs. Stork, who, however, is a landscape painter and singer. My ten years of university teaching might have made me feel as snobbish as some professors about the best seller. But for the last six years, since leaving, I have been learning to become a human being. There is something large and clean and stimulating in all you do that makes me prefer your work greatly to that of some of our so-called 'modern' writers.



“I had meant to tell you that while on a Red Cross mission for the government, the wife of my publisher, Mrs. F. N. Doubleday, and one of my very best women friends, died suddenly at Canton, China, in late February. Her remains are due, on the *Ecuador*, in San Francisco to-day. I cannot tell you how grieved we are. She was an imperial woman. She was almost six feet tall, rounded to dimples, but slender, of a marvellous coral-pink colouring, with wavy red-brown hair, blue-grey eyes, and even white teeth. I have seen more beautiful women than Neltje Blanchan; yet I never recall having seen so much beauty encompassed in one woman, taken as a whole. She had travelled the world over, was cultured to her fingertips, speaking many foreign tongues, her mother being from Normandy. She wore quaint, individual clothing, simply made, of rich materials, never in what is called ‘style,’ low-heeled shoes, and in every particular answered my favourite name for her, ‘The Gracious Lady.’ Her voice was clear, sweet music; she was quiet and gentle, yet buoyant with health. The last time she visited me she told me she had never been ill in her life. Her passing was from a stroke of some kind, probably superinduced by overwork. She was indefatigable in her work for the poor and the betterment of society. Why she was called and so many useless women left is another of my amazing problems this year.

“Spring is coming over the hill. I can see buds swelling, smell sap and the smoke of cleaning up land; many of the birds are here. Fifteen big loons sailed up the lake in a band the other morning, the big white fish ducks are busy around the shore, the mallards are hunting nesting places, and the white gulls dip their long wings in the little waves as they sweep low over the water. My

owl wintered all right; the big fox squirrels are out; the skunk cabbage is in bloom around the spring; and the sunny banks are pure gold with crowfoot. I shall put in a specimen for you. It is our very first flower of all, shooting up these little heads of pure gold on sunny March days, with not a leaf in sight; but it is not a native. It originated in Russia and northern China, and was, I think, brought to this country in seed wheat, like one of our most beautiful primroses. Beside the road my planting of the past fall is two inches high, and I think most of it is a grand success."

The following fall Mother returned to California, taking me and my two small daughters with her. The increased size of her household made a larger house necessary, so she sold the little bungalow, which she had always called "The Play House," and bought a home more suited to her needs near by. Of this new home she wrote to friends at Christmas time:

"At this season of the year I always think of you, and, as has been my custom for years, I send you a little gift from half around the world. I am so sorry to be a little late this year, but you may well know it was unavoidable. I came to California with my daughter, her two little girls, and my secretary, early in November; but we found my little bungalow far too small for comfort, so I was compelled to put it on the market and purchase a larger house.

"When I got the bedroom space I required, I found I also had a big house on my hands, and it required some fresh papering, floor waxing, woodwork cleaning, and glass washing. Much new furniture had to be selected, curtains made and hung—oh, such a lot of work! I sent

out our car, but it is delayed, and we lost our telephone in moving and must wait the tedious process of getting a new one installed, so everything we want one of us must board a street car and make a five-mile trip into the city, and it is tiring, and it eats up such a lot of time. But we are nearly enough settled now that each of us has a bed, and the house is taking on a semblance of comfort.

“It is a big Colonial house; I’ll send you a picture later when I have time to make some. We are up in the high part of the city, where we feel the presence of the mountains all day. Over and over I keep saying: ‘I will lift up mine eyes to the hills . . .’ The sea is only ten miles away, over a road smooth as a barn floor, and we go at least once a week. We shall go oftener when we get our car. Our street is lovely; a Frenchwoman said to me last week that she thought it the prettiest residence street in the world. You know, Los Angeles has building restrictions, and when a new street is laid off only residences may be built on it, each must have a lot of certain size, the building must be two stories, and must stand the same distance from the street as all the others. You may have a larger lot and build of size to suit your purse, above the limit set; you dare not fall below it. Out here where the world seems all sunshine, orange blossoms, and roses, and vegetation grows all the year round, it only requires a few months to get a start, and a few years will give you towering trees, masses of tropical flowers, ferns, and warm climate growth from far lands of all the earth. From my study windows I can count half a dozen differing kinds of palms, and my rose garden has over *seventy* varieties of the loveliest roses, many of them blooming in the face of Christmas, as do poinsettias, and hundreds of other flowers. The world is a

lovely place out here, and I sincerely hope that my daughter and the children will love it as I do. I think this purchase means that this will be home in the winter hereafter.

"If I had time to do it, I should be greatly interested in writing some sketches of travel in California. I see so much on the desert, in the cañons, and on the mountains that other writers have failed to mention, that I think I could do some quite interesting reading. I have no words in which to express what the ocean does to me, and the cañon does a bit deeper, and the desert deepest of all.

"Personally, I am feeling stronger and better than when I came to California. My doctor's orders were to keep quiet and to rest this winter. But the rest was not much of a success, as there are such a world of unusual and interesting things to see. Southern California naturally is mountains, rocks, sand, sagebrush, cacti, and a very few live oaks, with one great redwood forest in a northern valley. But some one found, in searching the mountains for gold, that it never froze there, so they have turned many parts of it into a great conservatory with no roof. All vegetable life makes an enormous growth in an incredibly short time, for there is no rest period. Things grow all the year round. Every tropical flower, fern, vine, shrub, bush and tree is a blaze of colour all the year. Rose fêtes on Christmas; orange, lemon, grapefruit, persimmon, plum, cherry, peach, pear, apple groves everywhere; olives climbing almost perpendicular mountain sides—anywhere *water* can be added to the soil you can grow anything you ever heard of. In December morning glories are blooming over the windows, and we have strawberries and all the green beans,

peas, etc., we can eat, also greens of all kinds, and tomatoes and all vegetables.

“In the afternoons and evenings this winter I have gone to many luncheons, receptions, dinners, and entertainments. A great many of the residents of California are cultured people of the East who have the wealth to come here and make their homes in a location where one can see the sea, desert, cañons, mountains, intensively cultivated orchards and fields, all within a radius of forty miles of Los Angeles as a centre, much of it within ten or twelve. These people have money and leisure to do what they please, and none that I have met are pleasing to pamper themselves. They take their pleasures, but at the same time, they are going somewhere to raise a fund or give an entertainment for an orphans’ home or crippled soldiers or unfortunate mothers. Mingled with these, one will meet actors, poets, authors, painters, sculptors, from all over the world, some of them attracted by the climate, some reproducing the scenery, some interested in moving pictures. Any one of them can stand on his feet and before any audience tell his story, sing his song, or explain what he is doing for the good of humanity, and why he is engineering his activities in the precise manner in which he is. I doubt if the life in this city can be equalled anywhere. It is a blaze of colour, a voice of rapture, a deep note of earnestness, a gay note of entertainment. Fine folk these artistic and creative people be! Some of them are self-seeking and selfish and pushing, as is the manner of humanity; but most of them are world-experienced, educated in adversity, a real treat.

“One never knows, when one starts out, what wonderful nature picture or human experience one is going to meet. It is all intensely broadening and interesting. I



cannot describe to you the splendour of some of the homes I have been in, the deliciousness of the food, or the beauty of the jewels and apparel. And these very folk are the ones who are helping every artistic and humane project, spending money like water over all sorts of institutions and projects for the benefit of humanity.

"I have been entertained a number of times on great battleships, since half of our fleet has been anchored all winter at Long Beach, a two hours' drive from my front door, over a road as level as your kitchen floor, bordered with pepper and palm trees and every rose known to the tropical world. We drive to the harbour, the small officers' launches come and carry us out to the big battleships. The guns are wearing their nightdresses. If it is windy, the decks are buttoned up in canvas, the holystoned floors are smooth and white, the flags are flying, the naval bands playing, the officers in their uniforms; the sea is a wonderful deep blue, the sky a lighter blue, and the white gulls and sea swallows are circling around the big ships. It is all a colourful and wonderful experience.

"You will be rather surprised to know that I have laid aside my breeches and boots. Which reminds me that Mr. Curtis, the Indian photographer, made a new boots-and-breeches picture of me in one of the cañons the other day. I am sending you a copy as soon as I have time to do it up properly for such a long journey. As I grow older I find that I resemble my father more closely. If you compare this picture with his face in your copy of *Homing with the Birds*, you will get the resemblance very distinctly. So, as I started to say, I have lain aside boots and breeches and put on crêpe and beaded chiffon and a French bonnet with roses and a veil; and I stand up and speak my little piece with the best of them without a bat



of the eye or a quiver of an eyelash—such self-assurance does one get from knowing that one absolutely knows one’s job. Also, I have been delving somewhat in moving pictures, and I hope during the coming year to produce one of my books, and, if it is a success, to go to others.”

Of our first Christmas in the new California home Mother wrote to Mrs. Wallace:

DEAREST LORENE:

This is the morning after, and “thank-you” notes are in order. It seems to me that was one of the very nicest Christmases we have had since the war. I do not think that there will be anything to compare with four or five we had at the Cabin before the war, just after we had butchered, when the larder was full of fine-grained, sweet pork, sausage, head cheese, pickled pigs’ feet, fruit cake, potato chips, fancy cookies, unlimited, delicious home-made wine, big, fat turkeys, and all sorts of game, and money with which to do what one pleased in the way of decorations and gifts, sleeping room for all the guests one liked, and plenty of competent servants. It sounds like a pipe dream as I think it over.

Then, there is nothing in all the world to surpass the beauty of our woods when the trees are bare and snow-covered, and the ground is white, and the lake coated with ice on which to skate and coast, and for ice boating. I can just shut my eyes and see the sails of George Triplett’s boat coming around the bend, and hear the crash of the runners, and see the skiff of powdered ice flying when he turned a sharp curve. And, believe me, there were no flies on the big, ice-cold bass that came in from the fish houses on the lake in those days! It seems a million miles away. I don’t think Christmas anywhere will ever

quite equal the Christmas of those days. I can make myself homesick good and proper just talking about them.

But, for all that, we had a pretty good imitation of Christmas here in California this year. In the first place, we were all feeling fine. In the second place, the house was lovely. I sent my Christmas decorations from the Cabin out with Jeannette's things. She brought hers, and there was enough for a small tree here, so we really had too much stuff on our tree, and I got a second small tree which I used on the buffet in the dining room for my Christmas party and gave to my little sister afterward to take home with her. I had enough of the cardinal birds for a flight across the curtains of every downstairs window, even to the kitchen. We had made ceiling decorations, and we had some velvet poinsettias that were good on the light fixtures; and I had over one hundred that I grew from last year's decorations in the back yard, great things as big as a dinner plate and as red as blood, for the dining table and big vases and jars everywhere, and quite a few exquisite roses from our own bushes. Then two of my friends sent in pots of blooming cyclamen that were exquisite, and with big wreaths on the front door and in the front windows, we were all dolled up. The Christmas tree stands where it shows from the window, and at night, with all the lights on, we certainly make a beautiful picture.

I want to thank you very much for your dainty and beautiful gift. It looks so like you that I almost feel as if I should send it back to you; it seems to belong to you more than to me. But you notice that I said "almost," so you needn't hope to get it.

I cannot recall, offhand, all the lovely gifts that came to me. There were four packages from "Heart's De-

light,” tea and maple sugar taking the place of the turkey, which could not come so far. The publishing house sent me half a dozen beautiful books—three novels and three books of travel. I had several other books, the children giving me a handsome gift edition of Fabre’s *Insect Life* illustrated exquisitely, I think in imitation of Isabel Adam’s *Flowers of England*. The artist followed my method of throwing in an exquisitely marked tree trunk, bark, or spray of flowers, as in my moth pictures and in bird stuff wherever possible, and you cannot imagine how beautiful the result is when delicately drawn and painted. I am so crazy about the book that I like to sit and hold it as you would a baby.

I would love to see all of you, especially John with his Christmas tree. Save a place for a big visit with us next summer.

The children are well, and I am much stronger and in better trim than I was last winter.

Write when you can and tell me all about yourself and both your men. With dearest love to each and all of you,

As ever,  
GENE.

## Chapter XXI

### "THE FIRE BIRD"

THE year 1922 was an exceedingly busy one. Mr. Harry Burton, the editor of *McCall's Magazine*, came to California with the express purpose of calling on Mother and persuading her to do a series of monthly editorials for his magazine. At first Mother was a little dubious about this, as she felt that *McCall's* might be just a little below the level in literary values of the other magazines to which she had been contributing. But Mr. Burton was a good salesman, and he knew how to reach Mother's heart. It did not take him long to convince her that it was the women who were reading his magazine, and who had to do without something else in order to pay for their subscriptions, who really needed the sort of message she could give them. For, after all, Mother was never much interested in society or wealth: it was the great mass of common people to which she belonged which intrigued her most, and it was these people she loved to help. So she told Mr. Burton that she would try writing the editorials for one year, and they would see what happened.

This was also Mother's first experience in writing under contract. She had always written whenever she felt like it, and had never obligated herself to finish a certain piece of work at any given time. In order to avoid having to send in an article on a certain day each month, she made a list of her subjects and did the whole

series for the year before she started any other piece of writing. They were a huge success and greatly increased subscriptions to the magazine. Mr. Burton came out again and asked for a series for the next year. Mother was so pleased with their popularity and with the scores of letters she had received from interested and grateful readers that she consented; and so, from year to year, the articles went on.

Mother grew extremely fond of Mr. Burton and considered him one of the most brilliant magazine editors in America. She wrote of him in one of her letters to Mr. Nelson Doubleday:

“There is something about Burton of *McCall's*, possibly that thing called ‘personality,’ that makes a deep appeal to me. He is a brilliant chap, clean as a ribbon, and if he is not a live wire, I do not know that article when I see it. And he is going straight ahead. His last issue of *McCall's* was fine. You could scarcely beat his list of authors, and he holds them absolutely to clean, sane stuff, not oversexed, and not tainted with the spirit of jazz and exaggeration which rules so much of the material that is being put out to-day. I take extreme pride in the way that magazine has grown during the past three years, and I hope that we shall be able to go on until we put *McCall's* at the top of American publications, just for the sake of having the fun of putting over something worth while. It is as clean as a whistle, full of vivid, interesting things, and it belongs to the people who are living as you and I live.”

In April of this year *The Fire Bird* was published. Something of how this book was written may be found in the following letter, which is quoted in part:

"It seems to me that all of our writers have done better work since the war. This I absolutely know to be the case concerning poetry. There may be nothing epoch-making in what is being done in this country in the line of poetry at the present minute, but it certainly is a heart-moving, visionary, exquisitely beautiful brain product.

"Ever since I have been in California I have been taking an active hand at the profession of poetry myself. Before that time it always had been a suppression, because I cannot remember the time when I was not interested in poetry and trying to write it, but I had some very discouraging advice when I was a youngster, on the strength of which I burned three books of poetry, one of which I would almost give my right hand to repossess to-day. So through the years, when anything became so insistent that I could not clear my mental decks for other action, I have written it and laid it away. Since coming to California, something in the wonderful air, the gorgeous colour on all hands, and the pronouncedly insistent rhythms of nature, all have combined rather to force utterance.

"Last summer I sent some of my work to perhaps the most highly cultured man in America, Dr. Charles Wharton Stork, for seven years a professor of literature in Princeton University, a man who lectures in nine different capitals of Europe on English literature, in each country using its native tongue, a feat which I doubt if another man in America can perform. For the past seven years Dr. Stork has been the editor of *Contemporary Verse*, himself a poet and a writer of almost classic prose. He is held by many in New York to be the greatest living judge of poetry in this country. I sent him a bundle of my work, and his reply came promptly and



was very gracious indeed. His comment was, ‘Why ask when you have only to command?’ and he prefaced this with a statement that he had read many of my books and greatly enjoyed them.

“I was so encouraged by his verdict and that of two other critics to whom I sent the same things that I have been moved to publication. The date of publication is set for the twenty-eighth of April; the title is *The Fire Bird*. For the great part the text is written in the rhythm of deep forest, but there are times when the wash of the sea and the winds of the cañons predominate. In every instance the natural history, the tribal characteristics and customs are absolutely correct, while throughout I have made a strenuous endeavour in all cases to use that one word which better than any other will, to a nicety, convey a delicate shade of meaning, paint a picture, or sing a song. I have used very great care in the make-up of this book, having personally designed the cover, the front matter, and drawn the first crude draft of all the illustrations, in order that the book shall in all ways be true to nature and to human nature.

“I got the nucleus of the idea for this in the second volume of Fraser’s *Folklore of the Bible* last summer. I had been mulling over it for months when I met a Polish actress wintering here, a woman of commanding presence, unusual beauty, and great talent. I met her at the studio of Edward Curtis, a man whom you will recall having read about. He is the greatest living photographer of human subjects in the open. He has done the photographing of the sachems, chiefs, medicine men, princesses, squaws, and braves of particular note of every Indian tribe in the United States.

“You will remember from *Laddie* and some things I

have written you that all my life I have been steeped in Indian tradition and history, having been born and reared near the camping grounds of the Potawotamies and the Miamis, and in my childhood I frequently visited the home of Chief Wacacoonah. My father and mother married and began life among the Indians. All my bedtime stories were tintured with Indians. When I lived in Wabash, Indiana, I was bounded on the west by the Miami Reservation, who boasted descendants of Logan, although his immediate family was supposed to have been wiped out. John Logan, however, claimed a rather immediate relationship with the old chief of the Mingoes. On the south we had old Chief Wacacoonah of the Meshingmesas and hundreds of his tribe among whom I circulated freely as a child, being well acquainted with the chief's daughters, Nancy and Susan, and often having been entertained in the old chief's home with my brother-in-law, who was an Indian agent and the guardian for many members of these tribes.

"For these reasons I always have been interested in Indian life and character. The house I live in is filled with cases containing Indian relics and specimens, and a very large collection of Indian arrowpoints, as well as dozens of skin-dressing implements, battle axes, war clubs, blankets, ceremonial robes, treasure chests, and baskets. The entrance hall to the Cabin is a war whoop, the electric light fixture being an Indian torch worked out from a design of mine by Gaumers of Philadelphia. It was partly for these reasons that I was interested in writing an Indian poem.

"Examining the perfectly wonderful Curtis pictures stirred all these things to boiling point, and a suggestion from Madame Reicher that she would like an Indian

tragedy for stage work set me going, so that in the midst of my very busiest time with the proof of the book my brain went whirling off at this new tangent, and red hot from the griddle I set down a tragic poem which is head and shoulders above any other work of the kind I ever have done. Unfortunately, it is one of those things so very high class, so for the few understanding ones, that I have the very gravest doubts as to whether I could market it if I wanted to. But, at any rate, I have had the mental and physical uplift of writing it, and this I have greatly enjoyed.

"But to go back to the inception of this tragedy. It came about through the heading in of three different factors. In Fraser's *Folk Lore of the Bible* I found the French explorer Du Prat's Indian legend concerning the Flood and concerning the redbird, which is my cardinal and which I used in *The Song of the Cardinal*, having, according to Indian tradition, been sent across the void from the soggy, flood-dripping world, to the camp fires of the Great Spirit to borrow a coal with which to replenish the quenched fires of earth, scorching his bill and plumage to flame-red thereby, and burning his face to coal blackness. Having once written a book about this bird, you may imagine how interested I was, and how sorry not to have known of this Indian legend at the time I wrote my book. But I carried in my mind copious notes in case any future opportunity might come for the use of the legend.

"Mr. Curtis is doing the photography and a great deal of the text on a magnificent big set of histories embracing all the known tribes of North America for a syndicate of Eastern millionaires, the finished volumes to sell for three thousand dollars a set. Naturally, Mr. Curtis's

studio is crammed with Indian implements and ornaments from every tribe in the country, magnificent pictures by the thousand, the place literally oozing Indian lore of all sorts. It was here that I met the charming and exquisitely beautiful Polish actress I mentioned above. We were all doing stunts. It was after I had recited a poem intended to voice the longing of the heart of a primitive woman for her lover that Madame Reicher asked me to write an Indian tragedy for her use on the stage. It was just at the finish of a new book, and I was dead tired, but the idea stuck in my mind. The redbird began to mix in, and a number of incidents Mr. Curtis had related, combined with a lifetime accumulation of Indian lore of my own, resulted in the tragedy which I sent Dr. Stork. His letter of criticism has just come in:

As to the Indian tragedy, it is unique, gripping, full of atmosphere. Good narrative poems are rare, and this is one of the best I have seen done in this decade on this side of the water. The test was that I had to read it aloud, and it went splendidly both for me and for Mrs. Stork. It will go without question, and I predict that it will add to your reputation.

Most obviously you write from a real urge, and you have a splendid feeling for oral rhythms, as if you had listened to the wind in the pines and the waves on the shore. You certainly lose the reader in the big feel of nature. You are a poet just as truly as you are a novelist, and another proof of my theory that the instinct and craft of poetry are an essential to any prose style of real carrying power.

"I have no words in which to express my debt of gratitude to the Doctor for the time he spent on me and the gracious manner in which he did it. What I wanted to know was whether I was wasting time when the urge to write these things comes upon me. All of my life I have been writing things that I thought might be poetry

and hiding them away because I was too timid to let any one see them. But, as I said before, I wish to heaven I had back again the material which I burned years ago. There is something about the stuff that springs from the first young urge of the heart and that is wet with the dew of youth and warmed with its enthusiasm that does not come with such spontaneity after years of contact with the world as it is met by most of us.

"The difficulties I have had with the illustration of *The Fire Bird* is a story all by itself. One thing so good I cannot wait to tell it was an illustration for the third part of the book, where the Mandan chief, Star Face, taught his little daughter, Dove Eye, love talk in the sign language. The picture was to illustrate the quotation:

Like the wings of a snow-white sea swallow  
Writing mating signs on the blue sky of Heaven  
Flashed his quick hands of entreaty,  
In the little love sign talk he taught her.

According to the sketch the chief was a Sioux instead of a Canadian Indian. He sat on a Diamond Dye blanket in front of a wigwam never known in Mandan country, and presented his little daughter with a flower! I objected to this and sent in drawn designs for an earth lodge, suggesting that the skin of a wild animal be stretched to dry on one side of it, and insisting that the chief and the child must be making the love signs with their hands. When the picture came back for correction, the earth lodge was a delicate pale green so that the chief's face would show up well against it. It was an earth lodge because it was in practically treeless country, but the trees were thick around it. The skin of a wild animal was that of a red calf with white spots on it! The position of the chief's hands translated in the sign language



read: 'I claim exemption from two kings.' And the child's hands were in the position for 'Porcupine, something having stiff hair.' This again was too much for me, and I had to fire it back accompanied by detailed description as to the position in which the hands of the child and the man would be placed in making the signs, 'I love you.' I suspect that they were both disgusted and furious, as I had already been told that the make-up in the first format was almost recklessly costly."

At the time of the publication of *The Fire Bird*, her first published book of poetry, Mother gave a party which she described in a letter to her friend, Mrs. J. W. McCamish, of Winchester, Indiana. She writes:

MY DEAR FRIEND:

Under separate cover I am sending you a copy of my latest book. I want you to constitute yourself an amateur book agent and see what you can do for the sale of this volume among your friends, because the making of it has been so very expensive that, if it does not sell well, I never shall be permitted to make another, and I feel that in this sort of work, which has been a lifetime suppression with me—in fact, I know—I can attain a higher grade of literary value than I ever have been able to reach with fiction. As for natural history, it gets no rating from a literary standpoint, no matter how beautifully it may be written, according to the rules.

As usual, everything pertaining to the decorations of the book, from the jacket and cover onward, is from my own designs. I can guarantee the natural history, the characterisation, and the description of Indians and habits absolutely. I hope you will not mind my having broken the rhythm with the location. I am so steeped in nature



that I could not select any one rhythm and carry it throughout when the scenes shifted from sea to cañon, from mountain to deep forest or meadow; so I changed the rhythm with the location, which I consider perfectly legitimate.

Before I ever sent the material to the publishers I sent it, with half a dozen other efforts at poetry, to three of the greatest critics of poetry in the country, and all of them were enthusiastic in their praise of the work I can do along this line. The other night, when I was guest of honour at the banquet of the Press Club of Los Angeles, the great Shakespearian actor, Frederick Warde, sat at my left. He said to me that he had read the first and second parts of the book, and if the third part sustained the dramatic interest and brought it to a successful tragic climax, he considered it the greatest poem that ever had been written in the United States. He also said that the rhythm of the speaking lines was absolutely perfect, because he had tried them upon the stage of his theatre.

William Sloan Kennedy, the old literary critic of Boston, who more closely resembles Thomas Carlyle than any critic of this country, wrote me concerning this book:

After three centuries of waiting, it is the first great poem on an aboriginal theme that the country has produced. It is an honour to American literature. The rich setting of the book, admirable as that is, would not have saved it were it not for the treatment, so beautiful and of such rich, wild savour; not a false note in it, so far as I can see, to mar its vraisemblance.

So, my very dear friend, you need not be afraid to recommend the little volume to your friends. It is my first stepping stone in an effort to establish for myself as high-grade literary value as has any writer in this

country, and I am asking the people who love me and who have cared for what I have done formerly, to enlist with me in this battle, and to do whatever lies in their power to help me.

I am desperately tired, as I have often told you, of having the high-grade literary critics of the country give a second- and at times a third-class rating to my literary work because I would not write of complexes and rank materialism, which is merely another name for adultery. These critics are mostly men, and they persist in handing the literary honours to men who put upon the pages of books pictures so rotten that were any one to attempt to translate them to the language of the screen, the world would throw up its hands in holy horror.

It is impossible for me ever to attain a high-grade literary rating with these critics because of this. My satisfaction will have to lie in the fact that the high-grade homes of the country, the cultured and refined people, do give me a first rating; and it is not sentimental women from whom I get it, but cultured and scholarly men in the highest walks of life. However, there is no reason why I should not make a first-grade literary reputation with poetry, which has been an obsession with me from childhood and which I have studied all my life in an effort to fit myself for such work.

I would have given almost anything had you been in Los Angeles the night of a party which I gave to celebrate the day of publication of my first volume of poetry. We had the house exquisitely decorated in red and white flowers, with two pools of pond lilies above which, on branches, perched stuffed specimens of the redbird, insured at one hundred dollars each and loaned me from one of the museums of the city. All the rest of the deco-

rations were carried out in red and white to match the water lilies and the redbirds.

We sent out about one hundred and fifteen invitations, provided seats, and started the party with a regular programme. The opening number was a flute solo, “The Song of the Nightingale.” Then I took the floor in a new evening dress of orchid chiffon velvet, looking, my friends were kind enough to say, the best they ever had seen me, probably because I was radiant with happiness, and I told this hand-picked bunch of friends, mostly artists, singers, painters, and poets, of the poetic ambitions of my lifetime, recited them a couple of minor poems for a start, finishing with a culminating effort which for sheer beauty of colour and imagery I have seen nothing in the English language to surpass, even though I say it as shouldn’t. Then my secretary, with the beautiful English accent on her tongue, read a Scotch review in rhyme, which very appropriately reached me only a few days before the party. It was a wonderfully clever production. Louise was gowned in a dark blue velvet dress which, with her complexion and hair, was quite stunning. More people than I recall have spoken to me since of how nicely she looked and how beautifully she read the poem, and at least half a dozen people have begged to be given copies of it as a keepsake. Then the musicians played “The Pastoral Symphony” with the bird notes done on a flute. Then a friend of mine, an English actress who has been on the stage since childhood, read a sequence, about an hour in length, from *The Fire Bird*, which I prepared for her by picking out the high spots here and there and so stringing them together as to give an idea of the story. Then I took the floor, called the kiddies to me, and they delivered to each guest an

autographed copy of *The Fire Bird*, each copy containing three Indian wishes especially fashioned to suit the environment and occupation of the recipient. The musicians closed the programme with Nevin's "Spring Song."

Then I held a little reception, and a buffet supper was served consisting of roasted turkey, spiced ham, vegetable salad, and all the trimmings, ending with ice cream, cake, and coffee. A number of people who were present told me that it was the most unique and the most beautiful party ever given in Los Angeles, but that I scarcely can believe. However, I will say one thing for Los Angeles: these millionaires and high society ladies give extremely expensive and extremely beautiful parties, but they do not put much thought on them. There is not much individuality. They all call the same caterer, and they all have practically the same thing, so that people were really prepared to be pleased over something of an innovation. If my sisters, Lorene, and the McCamishes could have been here, instead of being transported I really would have been in the seventh heaven. Now I am waiting with my heart in my mouth to see whether or not the book goes over.

Last Saturday afternoon I was invited to a banquet given on the stage of the Mission Theatre by John McGroarty, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Mission Play. Few were present except the members of the company. The banquet was Spanish and almost burned up my little insides with the heat of the chilis and tamales. Then there was an hour's programme of dancing, original songs, and talks by the company. It was one of the most unique and delightful performances it ever has been my privilege to witness. There was one woman on the

stage who had missed only one performance, that which fell upon her wedding day, in the ten years of the life of the company—a Spanish woman with curly hair, rather heavily set, who dances with the man with castanets in the second act. The man is her husband and has light hair, blue eyes, and a particularly boyish face. I think you will remember her. They have been with the company since its initial performance. The little Chiquita, whom Warde takes in his arms and handles, began the part at three years of age and kept it until she had so outgrown it she had to yield it. She is now thirteen and taking another part with the company.

After the programme we went over in the old San Gabriel gardens to study the bronze statue of Fra Junipero Serra, the original of the rôle taken by Warde. As we came out we walked squarely into Carl. We fell on his neck at once and were so perfectly delighted to see him that our escort stood back in blank amazement. I think he must have felt that we had found a long lost brother. We are expecting him to come to Los Angeles in a few days, and then we will do everything in our power to show him a good time.

With dearest love to you and James. We'll give the boy his share in person.

As ever your friend,  
GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

That *The Fire Bird* did find its place in the appreciation of many lovers of the beautiful in literature was proved by the numbers of letters which came to Mother after its publication, and though this book did not call forth so many responses as the novels have, those that came in were none the less sincere and voiced a keen



appreciation of its literary value. One letter which Mother prized because its writer was a man of discriminating taste, follows:

Seattle, Washington,  
June 28, 1922.

DEAR MRS. PORTER:

On my return from an Eastern trip I found amongst my letters a very pleasant surprise in one from you with an autographed copy of *The Fire Bird* for which we are both very grateful.

*The Fire Bird* shows all your characteristic power and wonderful insight into human nature. It is more than an Indian drama, because, with a master's hand, you touch the springs of human passion common to every race. The person who can read that poem of an evening, under favourable surroundings, and not find it difficult to compose himself to sleep in the succeeding two hours, ought to call in a doctor, for there must be something wrong with his heart and feelings.

You may not receive a prompt popular response to this tragedy because the cultivation of poetry in our day meets with as little return as the attempt to cultivate a garden in a desert where there is little or no water. Nevertheless, poetry has not been extinguished in the hearts of the people, but, for the hour, it has gone out of fashion. It will come back just as certainly as that terrible human passion you have portrayed in *The Fire Bird* will continue to move and agitate the hearts of human kind.

It seems that no matter what line of mental activity you turn to, you always bring to your subject the freshness and eagerness of youth.



Mrs. Burke and I promise ourselves the pleasure of reading this poem over again together. Mrs. Burke is especially interested in it from the Indian point of view, because she has been devoted to the Indians for years.

With kind regards to you and yours,

Sincerely,  
THOMAS BURKE.

## *Chapter XXII*

### MOTION PICTURES AND POETRY

SINCE her arrival in California Mother had been besieged by various picture companies to sell them the picture rights to her books. At first she was not particularly interested, and refused them all point-blank without even an interview because of one unfortunate experience. She had allowed a well-known company to do one of her early books. They had invited her to approve the adaptation and continuity and make suggestions; all of which she did. But when they made the picture, they ignored all of her ideas and suggestions. Consequently, the result was very unsatisfactory and disappointing to Mother, and she declared that no more pictures would be made until she was ready to make them herself.

About this time, she began to see that pictures could be made from her books which at least would be interesting to the people who read the books, and as she had some twenty-five million readers, she considered this sufficient audience to warrant the success of the pictures. Among many other picture men to whom she was introduced was Mr. James Leo Meehan, a young director with just enough whimsical Irish romance and sentiment in his soul to believe that the simple human stories of everyday life in Mother's books would be popular. She wrote of him to her publisher:

"Mr. Meehan will be in New York very shortly with my next picture, which I want you to see, and I hope that

you will find it a distinct advance on my first efforts at a picture. I have found him as bright as a whip-cracker, thoroughly well informed in the newspaper game and the picture business. He may be young, and he may be impetuous, and he undoubtedly will make some mistakes in the beginning, but I believe that it will be a good plan to hear what he has to say and to find out what his ideas are on any subject. It might be just possible that a new man coming into the game with wide newspaper experience to back him might be able to make some suggestions which would be of great benefit to us."

It is an extremely difficult thing to put a book on the screen in a way which will not be disappointing to the readers of the book. The mediums are so very different and few people understand the difficulties which are encountered when you try to tell a story on the screen in five reels of picture, which consumes approximately an hour and a half of time, in the same way as the author tells it in some hundred thousand words which it probably takes a couple of days to read. It is so much easier to describe a scene than it is to show it. An author can consume several pages in the character delineation of one person; but on the screen the character of that same person must be established in a few seconds' time. A novelist can use as many characters of as many differing types as he chooses; but the picture dramatist is bound by certain commercial conditions of the theatre and a rigid censorship in many states, which restrict his characters in many ways. Clever conversation in a book means little on the screen; incidents that in a book are most telling will fall flat on the screen; scenes that build up character, establish locations and the different rela-

tionships of characters must be omitted because there is no time for them. A play must be action, and nothing else counts.

Mother encountered the same difficulties with her first pictures that she did with her first books. She was assured by producers that they would not be popular because there was not sufficient action, there were no hair-raising thrills, there were no violent sex problems, and there was too much nature and too much "sugary romance." But Mother went serenely on her way with her same old motto of "Be sure that you are right; and then go ahead," and she trusted people to like the pictures just as they liked the books. Time has proved that she was eminently correct.

Mother formed her own company, employed Mr. Meehan to write adaptation and continuity and to direct the picture. She worked with him all the time, and during the actual "shooting" she was on the set every morning from nine o'clock until the running of the daily "rushes" about six-thirty in the evening. She enjoyed the work thoroughly, and I think nothing that she ever did in her life interested her more or gave her more real pleasure. Everybody on the lot was devoted to her, from the man who occupied the least important position, to the president of the company at whose studios she worked; and all because she always treated them kindly, having a smile and a few words of conversation for each one every day.

The first picture went slowly, as she expected it would. It was even more difficult to convince releasing organisations and exhibitors that the pictures would be popular if the public were given a chance to see them. The second picture went over much better, and she felt greatly

encouraged and enthusiastic about continuing. In the letters she wrote at this time she preached her doctrine of clean, wholesome, entertaining pictures, and urged club women all over the country to lend their support to her endeavour. From the following it will be seen how deeply in earnest she was in her desire to make good pictures and in her belief that she had succeeded in this.

Los Angeles, California.

MRS. EFFIE EASTON,  
President City and County Federation of Women's Clubs,  
Hotel Whitcomb,  
San Francisco.

MY DEAR MRS. EASTON:

In reply to your note of April 30 I can only say that I am delighted that you find my interpretation of *A Girl of the Limberlost* a beautiful and an instructive picture. As I said to you in my previous letter, the only way in all this world through which we can have better pictures is for more people to patronise better pictures than those who patronise the pictures filled with hokum and smut and every other harmful and insidious ingredient with which so many of the pictures of to-day are filled. Whenever a good picture is acclaimed, and there is a demand for it, the exhibitors will be delighted to show it.

The whole thing hinges right on this point. Are the home people, the church people, and the school people sincere when they say they want better pictures? If they are, here is a better picture, a picture full of courage, full of honour, full of hints as to how a girl may shape her life to get the best from it. It has an attractive love story in it and it is as beautiful photography and com-

position as I ever have seen in any picture. Every dollar of money that went into this picture I earned myself, most of it in the fields and woods and in the swamps, much of the time on my knees. It is the extent to which I am willing to go in order to prove that our young people are being shown the wrong kind of pictures. In this effort of mine I am trying to say to right-thinking people that this is what I consider the kind of a picture that a whole family might be interested in seeing, a picture that can be suitably shown in a church, in a school, or before any kind of an organisation.

But if I cannot have the support of the people in such pictures as this and *Michael O'Halloran*, then it is quite impossible that I should go on making pictures. I have done my share and done it at my own expense. Now if the club women, the school women, and the church women will stand by me, we can prove to the public what kind of a picture people really want, and we can prove to other producers that they must do clean, wholesome work in order to get such approval as a picture of this kind will secure. When you stop to consider that picture making is the third largest industry in the United States to-day, and that a bad picture reaches more people than any other one medium, certainly it is worth while for the women who are trying to better conditions to take hold of the picture question and have a thorough understanding as to what their desires are in the matter of better pictures.

And in this connection I should be mighty glad to see State Federations and the National Federation of Club Women hit some of the nasty books that are being produced to-day just as hard a blow as they would hit a nasty picture, and the same holds good of indecent dancing.



Everybody seems to be aghast at the tendencies that are cropping up in our young people, and these objectionable tendencies are fostered by and developed from indecent pictures, indecent books, and indecent dances. The sexes are being allowed to mingle at too early an age. Plastic and impressionable youngsters who should be occupied with outdoor exercise and education are putting in their time at oversexed shows and cheap dances, and in the reading of books and magazine stories that are appalling to any clean-minded mother.

I hope with all my heart and soul that in the coming Club Convention in Los Angeles the representative women of each state in the Union will deal such a blow as never before has been dealt at these three horrible evils.

Very truly yours,

GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

Mother often expressed herself about what she considered the most difficult thing to understand concerning the attitude of the general public toward pictures, namely, the very prevalent idea that all pictures should be made so that children may see them.

“. . . This is a mistaken idea. There are books for children, pictures for children, magazines for children, and there is music for children. You do not expect to allow your child to read *all* the books in your libraries, nor to understand *all* the music he hears, nor to attend *all* legitimate theatrical productions. Then why insist that you be able to take him to *all* moving pictures? There will be many not suitable for children, just as there will be books, music, plays, and magazines not suitable for children. Why insult the intelligence of a moving-picture audience by making all pictures suitable for children?

"Parents must have some control over what 'movies' their children attend, just as they supervise their other forms of education and entertainment. There are many pictures made which are entirely proper for children, and children should be restricted to those pictures. I should not like to believe that every time I went to see a moving picture I was going to see one made for a child; for I think I am capable of understanding and appreciating an entertainment that a child is not. I do not believe any adult entertainment should be limited to the comprehension of a child, nor to that degree of intimate problems suited to childish minds and morals."

Mother's last accomplishment for 1922 was the writing of *Euphorbia*, a poem descriptive of the struggles and hardships endured by a woman trying to reform her husband and make life possible on a ranch in Southern California. This poem was published serially, appearing in *Good Housekeeping* in three instalments. It was unique in that it was the first poem ever published serially in a magazine, and also because Mother was paid for it more than was ever paid for any poem published. The following letters show how close to her heart lay this suppressed desire to write poetry.

To Dr. Charles Wharton Stork she wrote:

"I must have been born with a good many things in my cosmos that I had an inclination to do, but the first thing I ever really manifested any inclination for was to write poetry, since I clearly recall the time when I was tugging at my mother's skirts, begging her to 'set down' things that I thought were poems, even before I could print, and I truly believe that if my mother had been possessed of the literary background and the time to have helped

me as Mrs. Conkling helped her little daughter, I might have been a poet instead of a number of other things for the being of which I care infinitely less.

"When I sacrificed my first three efforts at poetry, I was the victim of some extremely ill-advised advice from a person upon whose judgment I had the misfortune to rely utterly. I was told that writing poetry was primarily a gift from God; secondarily, the result of years of deep study, which I had not had, and had neither books nor opportunity at that time to attain. Such words as 'hexameter' and 'pentameter' were hurled at my unprotected head until in despair I gave up any idea of ever being able to write poetry. Yet as the years rolled along, and I had some small success with writing other things, the poetry virus still worked in me often, and I never missed an opportunity of purchasing a book and studying deeply the laws of poetry, the efforts of the poets of different nations; and when the day and the hour came that some poetic conception took form in my brain to such an extent that it was of no use for anything else, I wrote it and hid it.

"I find my mentality works in a very queer way. I do not profess to understand, but what I write clearly proves it. Whenever I pick up a pen and attempt to write fiction, I immediately begin romancing. I shall never forget the dumbfounded feeling that took possession of my heart and brain when in reply to my direct question to you as to whether I could write poetry, you made me reply, 'My dear lady, you never have written anything else!'

"In that judgment I am also forced to concur with you, excepting, of course, what I write concerning natural history, which is straight off the bat natural history of an

unquestionable grade. I can see straight, I can describe accurately, I can draw a logical deduction from what I see happening in the fields and woods. But when I attempt to write fiction, I write the featheriest kind of romance; and whenever I pick up a pen and begin to write poetry, I write the bloodiest realism. It is the queerest thing, but the only time I see life in the raw, see it as it really is lived by aching, sinning, suffering, struggling, rejoicing humanity, is when I try to express myself poetically. No doubt the joke is on me, and I can see that it is a reasonably sized, fine, healthful one; but what I am going to do about it I do not know, except to take whatever small gift God may have given me and use it to the best of my individual mental capacity. I have wasted a thousand things as fine as 'The Wine Pitcher' in the past twenty years because I thought they were no good, and I would not take time from work I knew I could do, that would be appreciated by people in general, to write the visions that came to me; and when I did write anything, for the greater part it met the fate of 'The Wine Pitcher,' which is still awaiting its day after nearly twenty years.

"One thing I can see sticking out and through and over, and dominating every line I feel impelled to write in a poetic way, and that is the million little things that I have learned in a lifetime of experience in the fields and woods. Last night, at a wonderful entertainment at the big Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, in talking of nature stuff with a woman of international renown, I happened casually to say to her that with my eyes closed, lying on the leaves in the woods, I could differentiate between the crisp, military tread of a cricket crossing a dry oak leaf close to my ear, and the soft, velvety step

of a spider, or the lagging crawl of the many-footed caterpillar, the little quick, wiry tread of the ant, or the slow, dragging footsteps of a bee; and the woman simply stared at me as if she thought I were insane. The only trouble was that I made a mistake in the selection of my audience. If I had told that to Henry Fabre, the result would have been different, because he would immediately have described the diffuse, scratchy tread of the beetle, or the sinuous, velvety slippings-by of a grass snake.

"Spring is well over the hills in California. It is so lovely to-day that I wish all the world not in an equally beautiful location were here. The Sierra Madres, snow-blanketed and cloud-veiled, are mighty good looking. The desert is beginning to show colour; the beaches are washed white and clean, and the cañons are always a miracle. I send every happy wish to you and Mrs. Stork.

"Very truly yours,

"GENE STRATTON-PORTER."

To Mrs. Anne Pennebaker, a friend whose literary opinion Mother valued highly, but who found it difficult to accept the new, formless poetry of the moderns, Mother wrote:

"I think you are one of the bright spots God has given to cheer weary writer people, for writing as an occupation does grow wearying to the last degree, and when illustration in the shape of natural history work with a camera is added, one's hands and heart usually are filled. Your dear letter is a beautiful and encouraging thing and, believe me, I shall work better in the future for it, because I shall be hoping always to do something more, worthy of a place on that shelf of yours.

"My friend, rest assured that you never will hurt my



feelings by telling me the truth. It is not my fault, and very likely it is not yours, that you are not acquainted with the new forms in which people are struggling to express themselves poetically. I have coming in *Good Housekeeping*, as soon as the poem is finished, an article on poetry. In the latter part of that you may find some help with your difficulty. I will try as soon as I can find the time to take a few verses of the poem and measure it in syllables and then mark it off in measures and place the accents, and by reading aloud I think you can soon fall into the swing of it. What you write concerning it is precisely what my eldest sister said. She was almost in tears when she caught my arm and said: 'It's a heart-breaking story. It flows the smoothest of anything I ever read in print; but for God's sake don't publish that and call it poetry!'

"To me *Euphorbia* is poetry because it is written in the old ten- to eleven-syllable Miltonic verse form; because underlying it are the diffused rhythms of the outdoors as my ear picks them up on the highway, on the desert, in the mountains, in the meadows, in the open places. A few times it sweeps into the measures of the sea or the cañons. I said in speaking concerning it before the Poetry Society that I very gravely doubted whether I was entitled to call it poetry; I thought probably I should have called it a prose etching.

"I would like you to see, also, a letter which came a day or two ago from Dr. Charles Wharton Stork in which he says: 'I am somewhat tickled with my critical judgment as to the merit of the poem. Many congratulations on your triumph! As you know, I stand for poetry with a broad, healthy appeal. No art can be great that is too intellectual, stylistic, specialised. I be-



lieve that your epics will live longer than your novels and will fall into place with the best we have done thus far in this country.'

"*The Fire Bird* was written in what is known as 'free verse.' It conformed to no form or measure, but ran with the winds and the waters, changing with different locations. *Euphorbia* is written in a form of blank verse as old as the hills. It is more difficult to bring out the measure and rhythm in reading because my ear is so finely tuned to outdoor rhythms that, no matter if I set myself a formal measure, I still find natural rhythms creeping in. Through the first instalment of the poem, and probably half of the next instalment, the rhythms are broken. It was a struggle. Everywhere 'Marge' turned she was defeated. She was like a bird battering her wings against the cage of Life. One very great poet said to me the other day: 'I actually felt physically bruised and beaten as I read the first scene of your poem, but in the latter scene, as matters begin to straighten out a bit, I could almost put my fingers on the line where the rhythm changed and began to flow smoother, easier.'

"You will have the same difficulty with the Flagg likeness that you have with the poetry. The spirit of each of them must be got at through an impression. Flagg was not trying to draw a likeness of me. What he was trying to do was to draw a picture of the impression that I made upon his sensibilities. In other words, he was trying to show you what he considers to be the measure of my intellect and the picture of my soul. There is one phase of that picture that hurts me like a knife thrust. I cannot help feeling that he is a very great artist, and his art was never greater than when he set upon my face and in my eyes the inner longing of my soul, the urge to

give more than it is in my power to make articulate, either with words or pen. There is a little bit of wistful, disappointed look that I thought was veiled from the world. I always have known that it was there, and it will probably grow stronger the older I grow, but I did not think that any one else saw it or knew about it, and here I find it on a printed page for every one to stare at. I feel almost as desecrated as if I had been stood up in public with my body stripped. There is in me an impulse whenever I look at that picture to take my two hands and cover it up. And I learned from it why there are times when an artist puts a thing on the face of his sitter that makes a man want to take a gun and blow out his brains and that does frequently result in a canvas being ripped to ribbons.

"I am very proud that the Doubledays want my work and so often ask me for it, for they are the biggest and best publishing house in the world, in my estimation. I was so pleased over what you said of them that I copied it in one of my letters, and the head of the house, Mr. Frank Doubleday, wrote me that it was 'the very nicest compliment their house ever had.' They are very good to me and grant me many unusual favours.

"I surely wish that I might live to see these books I have worked so hard over in every school in the world where English is spoken, and I could even see them go into the schools of some of the seven foreign countries into the language of which they have been translated. And on this subject, it is to rejoice! My dear friend, do you know that my *Cardinal* is living at twenty years of age and singing in seven foreign languages and two styles of Braille point for the blind? Isn't this really worth while? I am so happy about it.

"If you are coming to California to live, I wonder if the God of kind fortune has not decreed that we shall some day meet face to face. I have bought the house I live in and expect to come back next winter and possibly all winters after this, and so if you come far enough South, and I go a little North, why, you see, by next winter we might easily find each other. And really, the good country in Los Angeles is all —— look what I have done! I intended to say that all the good country in California is around Los Angeles, and your mannie may keep on coming until he gets here at last.

"With love and many thanks,

"Your friend,

"GENE STRATTON-PORTER."

## Chapter XXIII

### "THE WHITE FLAG" AND "JESUS OF THE EMERALD"

IN August, 1923, *The White Flag* was published. Into this book Mother put more stark realism and more of the seamy side of life than any of her other books contain, and for this reason it proved less popular than many of the others. This only proved her own idea correct, which was that, after all, away down deep, the American people can be trusted to like the simple, beautiful things of humanity and nature. I believe she really wrote *The White Flag* just to see whether she was right or wrong, and to prove to some of the critics of her "sugary romances" that she was not ignorant of life's cesspools and could write about them if she chose.

*The White Flag* was published serially in *Good Housekeeping*, and this paragraph from a letter written to a friend shows that it was far from unpopular:

"Yesterday I received the first copy off the press of *The White Flag*. On the flyleaf by Mr. Doubleday's hand there was a statement that it was the first copy from the press, that the firm stood solidly behind it and would do everything in their power to make it a success. This was signed by the Big Chief himself, by the treasurer, S. A. Everitt; by Nelson Doubleday, the son of F. N. D.; by Mr. Maule, the editor of *Short Stories*; and by the head of the book editorial department and the head of the sales department. There was a little special note accompanying the volume telling me that the head of the

sales department had secured a pre-publication order of the book by the American News Company for one hundred thousand copies, the largest order that ever had been given by one concern for anything; that at the date of publication there were another hundred thousand from orders sent in by their own concern, and that also there were orders for a third hundred thousand for Christmas delivery. The date of publication is August 17th, and at least it is started with the biggest pre-publication sale any book has ever had. Altogether, this seems to be my year."

The following letter from a college girl is enthusiastic:

"God has certainly made you a blessing to the world! I just now completed reading *The White Flag* and feel so inspired to do something to help others. You present morals in such a beautiful and interesting manner that one can never forget. I remember several years ago when I read *A Girl of the Limberlost*, I thought: 'There is no other to equal this,' but to-day I realise *The White Flag* holds still a deeper and more wonderful meaning. You have so endeared yourself to us all, Gene Stratton-Porter, that I feel to you as a friend."

A minister in Ohio wrote that he was using *The White Flag* as one of his gospel messages from modern fiction to his congregation, and Mother replied by saying that he had hit upon exactly the thing she had intended the book to be: "the straightest gospel that my experience with life has enabled me to evolve on the text, 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.'"

To a woman who evidently found the book too realistic, Mother wrote:

MY DEAR MADAM:

In reply to your letter of October 17th I am writing to say that I most sincerely hope that I am not the same person who wrote the books you mention. It is my crowning ambition to be a growing concern, and I would hate dreadfully to think that I could not write a bigger book, a broader book more deeply searching into the workings of the human heart and the outcome of following its promptings than I could twenty years ago.

I am wondering if, instead of hiding *The White Flag*, you would not do a much better thing if you would take it out and wave it on the street and loan it to all your neighbours. In the first place, it is a book of character analysis such as I never before have written. In the second place, it is written in a more deeply searching and a more highly polished brand of English than I ever before have used in the construction of a book, and in the third place, it tells nothing but the truth as I have seen the truth all the days of my life.

I think possibly I wrote this book at this time because the critics are constantly telling me that I do not know life and that I will not tell the truth about things. So I felt that, in this one instance at least, I would show them that I did know life and that I could tell the truth about the seamy side of it as well as about the pleasant.

Think it over and see if you do not think that you would do more for yourself and your neighbours if, instead of hiding the truth, you would do all that is in one woman's power to bring it out into the light, to leave it there to help other people to do the same.

Very truly yours,

GENE STRATTON-PORTER.



In December of this same year two books were published: *Jesus of the Emerald* and *Wings*, the latter being a collection of nature stories. Of the former Mother wrote Dr. William Lyon Phelps of Yale University, an old-time friend of her work:

MY DEAR FRIEND:

I've been and gone and done it again, and I am mailing you a copy of the results! Will you please reverse it and read the "Afterword" before you read the part concerning the subject, because I want you thoroughly to understand the why of it before you begin. And I hope, as of old, that you will not hesitate to put on your critical spectacles and tell me what you think of this as a literary performance, because I value your opinion, and there are frequently suggestions you make by which I can profit.

If undying patience, work, and ambition would land one at any real literary goal, I should be able to achieve a high mark poetically. Unless this is possible to me, I have absolutely no poetical ambitions. I do not care to be a third-rate or even a second-rate poet. If my work in this line, coupled with my years of scientific Natural History achievement, does not enable me to carry out my particular trend of thought in a manner nothing short of first class, then it is not worth the doing. I am tired of my present literary rating, so I am going to fight tooth and claw for a top-notch rating poetically. I have faith that, in the parlance of the day, "I can deliver the goods" along this line, and if I did not believe that you and a number of other first-class critics to whom I have submitted the poetical work I can do, feel that it is work of as high a grade as any one is doing to-day, I would not send one line of it to any publisher.

My friend, Mrs. Kathleen Norris, told me the other day that you had been saying things about me in a recent issue of *The Bookman*, but I have not yet seen a copy of the issue. I noticed a quotation from an article by you in *The World's Work* recently which must have been taken from what you had to say in *The Bookman*, and I was pathetically grateful to you for what appeared to me to be something approaching adequate recognition of a lifetime of strictly scientific field work. I have yet to find the first scientist who could controvert any idea advanced, any personal discovery, or any statement made in seven books I have published on natural history; but these books have been so overshadowed by the popular demand for my novels that the general public knows nothing about them, and the general literary critic less than nothing. Had this amount of personal work, of new discovery, of patient study, been done in France, I should have been lauded as another Fabre. I would have had recognition in England, and in Norway or Sweden I would have earned a Nobel prize with it; but I am a living example of a prophet who is without natural history honour in his own country, and it happens to be the natural history and the poetry which are to me absolutely absorbing. Surely, I shall be delighted if you find the work that I can do poetically worthy of unqualified appreciation.

With all good wishes for you and yours, I am,

Yours very sincerely,

GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

To Miss Harriet Monroe, editor of *Poetry*, Mother wrote:

MY DEAR MISS MONROE:

In due course of time I received your letter. I am sorry that work gets you by the throat as it does so many

of us, but I can gather from each volume I handle of *Poetry* the things with which you have to contend and how frequently your mood must be combative. I hope this phase of your life does not strain to such an extent that it mars the quality of your own work. I am still clinging to "Supernal Dialogue" as one of the finest things that ever has been written in this country, and you would be surprised how frequently here in the eminences of the Sierra Madres and beside the sea those two beings of yours sit out on the farthest point and watch for the flowering of the creations of majesty.

Under separate cover I am mailing you a little volume which I hope you will enjoy. I am going to ask you to begin at the middle and read the latter part first so that you may have in your mind as you read a definite background as to what I am trying to do. There was an exquisitely beautiful conception in my brain when I did this piece of work all alone from midnight until morning after the experience of a wonderful day. But I was not able to make the consummation anywhere nearly as beautiful as the inspiration. That, I suppose, is the cry of every heart struggling for self-expression. Anyway, I hope you will like the little book, and I would appreciate a line from you if you truly feel that it comes anywhere near being poetry. The first letter that I have had concerning *Jesus of the Emerald* came to me from the editor of *The Poetry Review* of London, and it was a very charming letter, highly commendatory. I think it clearly expresses the feeling that the poem is eminently worth while and that the "Afterword" proves my contentions.

I was very glad indeed for your letter saying the mention I had given *Poetry* had been of some use to you. I should greatly appreciate being in a position where I

could do something for poets and for poetry, which I love to the extent of adoration, and so I am very glad if I have been of the least help, and I shall remember in the future, if any place arises in which I see my chance, to acquaint people with the beauty and the bravery of the work you are doing.

Very truly your friend,  
GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

To Mrs. Pennebaker Mother wrote explaining the inception of the poem:

"It seems to me as I study contemporary history and think things over and fit the different bits together that they all form a perfectly plain pattern, and I have a deep and abiding conviction that what I have here presented is the truth. Certainly, I feel that I did have help in the writing of this poem. I know that you would be interested in the way that it occurred.

"In 1919 when gathering material for my volume, *Birds of the Bible*, I came upon a description of Jesus Christ which so fitted in with my personal conception of what He was like that I used it in my book. I always have been a person of the fields and the outdoors, and from my early Biblical training I happen to know that Jesus Christ was the same kind of a person, and I happen to know that He could not possibly have performed the offices attributed to Him in the Bible had He been a weakling and an anæmic. I get so tired of representations of Christ as a round-shouldered, woman-faced old man of fifty or sixty, when, as a matter of fact, at the time of His execution He was thirty-three, the very cream of physical, virile manhood.

“Mr. Charles Anderson, a man from Australia, mailed to me a packet containing the picture which I used as the frontispiece in my book. With the picture he sent a letter explaining that it was the portrait described in *Birds of the Bible*. The day I received this packet I was just starting on a motor trip in Southern California. I carried the picture and the letter along and read it to my daughter and her escort, a youngster who has since become her husband. I had a wonderful journey, and in the old mission garden of San Juan Capistrano, which was the headquarters of Fra Junipero Serra, my mind was full of the picture and the description. The head gardener gave me three pomegranate slips from the roots of trees three hundred years of age which Fra Junipero had carried from Spain in his hands on his last visit to his native country.

“In looking over the lovely hills green with spring and bright with flowers, I said to Mr. Meehan: ‘You know, I believe that we are very nearly in the same geographical latitude as the Holy Land. I believe that what we are seeing to-day is very like what Jesus saw when He travelled over the hills and through the valleys on His mission on earth.’

“On the way home we passed, about ten o’clock at night, one of the huge gushers which are occasionally drilled in the oilfields here that take fire from friction caused by the rush of gas and oil to the surface. The spectacle was terrifying and magnificent. I have no idea of the height to which the flames poured from the earth. Huge stones and rocks were carried up and fell red-hot in a glowing circle around the mouth of the well, and great volumes of smoke of the softest pinks and grays



and lavenders and almost blood-red boiled up around the flame tongues which shot high into the sky.

"I came home exhausted with beauty and with wonder, physically tired, and rolled into bed. And immediately this poem began coming as it is here recorded with scarcely the change of a word. Far into the night I had gone over it for the third time, and then I punched up my pillows and tried to control my mentality, tried to settle down and go to sleep; and I found that sleep was impossible. I realised that while I had been working I had been praying; that I had been begging the Lord to help me to do a big thing, a beautiful thing, a thing that would be of benefit to the whole world, and as I lay there unable to sleep, this thought came to me: 'You have prayed the Lord for help. You feel that the poem as it stands in your mind is better than you could have done alone. Now perhaps the Lord does not want you to go to sleep and take the risk of forgetting.'

"So I got up and slipped into a heavy bathrobe and night sandals, and wrapping a big blanket around me, I went in to my desk because I could not use the typewriter without awaking my family and causing protest. So I sat down alone in my library and wrote out the poem as it here stands in longhand. When I finished I got up and pulled back the blind, and I could see down the Avenue to Sixth Street, and a little rosy finch was singing in the jacaranda tree under my window.

"I hope you will like the poem, and I hope you will do all in your power for its circulation among people who may need its help. It is the same old story: My publishers will make any kind of a beautiful book I design and send in to them, but they will not lift a finger to circulate it among the people unless it is fiction or natural



history. For poetry they have less use than a rooster would have for skates.

“With much love,

“As ever your friend,

“GENE STRATTON-PORTER.”

In the “Afterword” of *Jesus of the Emerald* there are a couple of sentences which clearly show Mother’s philosophy of life and religion. She has written:

“In the economy of nature nothing is ever lost. I cannot believe that the soul of man shall prove the one exception.”

## *Chapter XXIV*

### *"AS THE YEARS GO BY"*

DURING the spring of 1924 Mother was persuaded to appear at one or two of the meetings of the National Federation of Women's Clubs which was holding a convention in Los Angeles. It so happened that the Indiana State President, Mrs. O. M. Pittenger, was a guest in her house, and much as Mother disliked public appearances, she found it difficult to say "No" to this kindly woman's urgent askings. Of her speech in the big Philharmonic Auditorium Mother wrote to her sister Florence:

"I have not been able to write you sooner, having been so extremely busy with the convention. Yesterday was my big day. I got me a new dress for the occasion—a printed georgette in colours of brown and cucumber and lettuce green, beaded in the cucumber green beads; and I had a hat to match. At twelve o'clock I went to the Biltmore to a banquet at which I was one of the guests of honour in conjunction with Rupert Hughes, Princess Cantacuzene, Mrs. Bob Burdette, Lillian Goldsmith, and a number of others. The luncheon did not amount to much, and I did not eat it. When it came to my turn to speak, they insisted that I should stand on a chair, and it made something of an ordeal as I never did such a thing before in my life, but they turned two chairs with their backs to the table, and with those chairs for a platform I made my speech. My subject was 'Journalistic

Idealism,’ and I did the best I could on it in the limited space of time one has at a banquet.

“You remember the big Philharmonic Auditorium here? At two-thirty yesterday I spoke there. The stage was covered with chairs, the building was packed to the roof, the stairways were full, and hardly half the crowd that wanted to get in could be admitted. My subject for the afternoon was ‘What Appeals to People, and How Club Women Can Best Aid in the Movement for Better Pictures.’ I was not in the least frightened or nervous. I have gotten past that sort of thing in the multiplicity of experiences of the kind. I admitted that censorship was wrong as it existed and was not doing the work that it was intended to do. I admitted that it was not right for people who knew nothing about the making of pictures to be given the power to mutilate the work of people who would make them lovely and with very great care; but at the same time I stuck to it that there needed to be some restriction on the people who are filling pictures with hokum, with indecent sex situations, and with portrayals of crime that Judge Ben Lindsey says the boys who come before him for petty crimes tell him they learned how to ‘get away with’ from watching the same kind of scenes in moving pictures.

“When the thing was over they almost mobbed me. I had simply to fight my way out of the building and across the sidewalk to the car. I could feel women patting my back, touching my dress, and when finally my driver got the car open and got me in and started to drive away, at least three women were standing in the gutter with their hands thrust through the door trying to shake hands with me. Mrs. Pittenger said she had seen some ovations in her time, but never in her life had

she seen anything like this. So to-day I am feeling pretty lean mentally."

Years before Mother moved to California herself her eldest sister, Mrs. Katherine Marshall, had come to Los Angeles to live, and Mother took keen pleasure in going to see the little old lady, who was an invalid bound to her wheel chair, and taking her flowers and copies of the magazines which contained her articles. During her last years Aunt Kathy came to look forward eagerly to these visits from "Gene," who was to her still the baby of the family. Of her Mother wrote to Mrs. Wilson:

"I went to see Kate late Wednesday afternoon and for the first time found her face colourless, her eyes dull, and her condition despondent. She told me that during her afternoon nap she had dreamed that her room was full of big black birds that were picking and tearing at her, and she awakened struggling frantically to drive them away. She said that twice before in her life she had had the same dream and every time there had been a death in the immediate family. As she was the oldest and in the worst condition, she figured that this time the call was for her. She had ordered her maid to set a box out and was making up a bundle of some of her best belongings that she was planning to send to her daughter, in order to make sure that she got them in the event of her death.

"I teased her and laughed with her, and tried to divert her mind. I told her the Lord would not send an ugly black bird to pick and pull when He wanted her. When she could tell me that a beautiful white bird had come into her room and sat on the foot of her bed and sung a lovely little song to her, I would believe that it

might be a message from the Lord to let her know that it was time for her to try her wings. This comforted her a little, but the next morning while I was at the breakfast table, I got the telegram from Grace and Will announcing Alvy's death. So now Kate is going to be *sure* about the birds.”

Of their last visit together and Aunt Kathy's death, Mother wrote to her sister Florence:

“After finishing up my mail on Monday I took Miss Foster and went to the country. As we came out from the gates of Bel-Air under the great sycamores growing in a valley there, I discovered a world of mustard just right for greens. So we stopped and gathered a lot. Frank, my driver, came up with a bundle and said: ‘Now this is all we can use.’

“But I said to him: ‘No, I want this much more. I am going to take a big bundle to Kathy and Jerome.’

“So we gathered a lot more, and as we drove into town I had him go past my meat market and get about the lower third of two hams. It was my original plan to drive past Kate's and leave the things and come home for dinner, but I remembered that I had not been there since the Saturday before, when I had gone to take her for a ride, and found her with a little cold so that she thought best not to go.

“So I said to Frances: ‘I believe I will go home and get my dinner and clean those greens myself, and then I will go over and spend the evening and take them to them when I can have time to visit a little.’

“This plan I carried out. When I went in I said to Kate: ‘Well, how are you?’ And she looked up at me and saw the big pan of greens and her eyes fairly snapped.



The answer she made me was: 'Just fine! And you couldn't have brought me anything in the world to eat I would rather have than mustard greens!'

"I carried the big pan over and set it on her knees to let her see how fresh and fine they were, showed her how the stems would snap, and pulled the paper open so that she could see the pink circle of ham to cook them with. She was so crazy about them, she took a big, green leaf in her fingers and sat and nibbled it!

"I took off my things and stayed at least two hours. I had saved up four funny stories to tell Kate, and she laughed until at one time I cautioned her to be careful for fear she might roll out of her chair. As long as I live I will see her sitting there laughing, with the tears rolling down her cheeks. They really were awfully funny stories.

"They have been making some changes in the telephone, and when I left I cautioned Jerome to call me in the morning the first thing he did to be sure that he could work the 'phone all right so that he might get me in case he wanted me. So when Gussie came in the next morning and said Mr. Stratton was on the 'phone, I merely thought he was doing what I had asked him to do. I was up in my room, dressing to go to the mountains, and had on my field clothes when I went to the 'phone, and what he told me was that he had just gone in to help Kathy up for breakfast and had found her dead. He begged me to come to him as soon as I could.

"When I got there, I found that beyond question, by every evidence I could adduce, she had passed in her sleep very early in the evening. She was lying in the position she always sleeps in, her body at the angle it always lies, her hands folded across each other on her

breast. The cover was smooth and even across her and under her chin. I think she was so ripe and ready to go that she simply went without even moving her hands or her body in the slightest degree. She had made no complaint, and felt perfectly well when she went to bed. She had been cheerful and happy, and everything was fine when she was tucked in and said her prayers and went to her long sleep.

“I told the undertaker what had happened; that she was just a little old lady, and she was timid, and she had wanted so much to stay on her own bed and in her own home until time to go out and lie down by her son; and he said all right, he would do it that way.

“In death Kathy looked as she did at forty. Her eyes were neither hollow nor dark; her cheeks were filled out; her neck was full and rounded; her hair was fluffy and shone like lustre, and along her face and over the top there was not a grey strand in it—a beautiful, bright, shiny brown. It was waved in soft waves and coiled on top of her head. They do not make those horrible shroud things any more. She wore a lovely grey dress of soft *crêpe de Chine*; from the elbows down to the wrists it was a filmy grey cobweb lace gathered up and tied with little ribbons. It had a beautiful white collar at the throat, and the whole front down to the knees was of the grey lace with a soft silk sash. The skirt was an accordion-plaited soft grey silk, and there were the loveliest little grey shoes with bows on top of them.

“I took forget-me-nots and made a wreath around her pillow and down the sides and filled her hands with them, and on the top of the casket where the lower part closed, I laid a circular bouquet of these little tiny bits of pink roses and heather and lavender stuff that Leah Mary and

Alice had bought out of their own money. On the top part I laid a piece brought by James and Gladys of lavender tulips and heather, a very exquisite and beautiful thing. And on the lower part, a piece from Jerome, Vic, and Cosette of pale yellow trumpet narcissus and Scotch broom and a lovely blue iris. A big, delicate lavender spread, lace-trimmed and velvet-bordered, and a lace veil that looked like what we used to call 'illusion,' also trimmed with lace and lavender, went all over the casket and draped from the top, and Kathy was as sweet and peaceful and as beautiful as you could possibly imagine.

"Leo said both the children wanted to see her. Gene never had seen a dead person, and Jeannette had accidentally seen the man taken from the lake last summer, so she had a horrible impression of death in her mind. In the circumstances, I told him I thought it was best to let them come; so I took the two kiddies and put an arm around each of them, and in their mother's stead I took them in, and when they saw what a vision of loveliness it was, the little things gasped in surprise. I tried to explain to them that death was beautiful; that it was our same Aunt Kate we had always loved, but she was little and old and tired, and the machinery had run down. She had lived her life and the time had come to go, and she had gone peacefully in her sleep so that her hands were not even unfolded on her breast. Without any hesitation, little Gene walked up and laid her hands on her. She wanted to kiss her good-bye, but I told her I had powdered her face and I was afraid she would make a mark on it, and I thought she had better not. Of course, Jeannette wanted to see her dress, so I showed them her pretty plaited skirt and her soft little grey shoes. Gene

wanted to touch them, and that was all right. And as for little Jeannette, I think she felt infinitely better. The man she saw last summer had been in the water all night and half a day and was badly stained and bloated and muck-covered, a horrible sight. It really was best for the kiddy to see death in its most beautiful form. Nothing could have been lovelier than Kathy.

“The minister of the Methodist Church conducted the services. He brought with him two women who sang the beautiful old hymns ‘Rock of Ages’ and ‘Abide with Me,’ and the things we all love when we are in trouble, and then he told about one day when he had visited with Kathy and she had asked him if she might talk to him about her mother. She told him about how many children she had had, and how she rode her horse to doctor the sick women of the neighbourhood, and how she went at the birth of little children, and how no stranger ever was turned from her gates, and how she fed the ministers and gave liberally to the poor, and the kind of a life she lived. And she told him that Mother had a favourite hymn, and she could quote some of the verses to him, and that, when her time came, she would like to have him conduct her services, and she would like to have that hymn sung. At the time he had taken the trouble to look up the hymn and have a typed copy made, which I found among her papers. I am going to ask Frances to type it and send a copy to you and Ada. It may be that you have it in your hymn books. I had not thought of it in years, but the instant I had the first line for a cue I could have recited the whole thing. It was written by a Dr. Hunter, and it begins:

“There is a spot to me more dear  
Than native vale or mountain . . .

and so on through three or four verses, the point of the whole thing being that the dear spot was where the Saviour had been found and a sinner had found his sins forgiven.

"I am also enclosing in your letter a picture of the minister who conducted the services. You will see what a kindly face he has. He said that he never had called on Kathy that he had not come away having gained much more than he had to give. The best of the singers he brought with him sang this hymn as a solo and sang it exquisitely. He talked beautifully concerning Kate's life and especially thanked the Lord for her passing with folded hands and smiling face, in her sleep.

"Then we took her out to the cemetery and laid her beside her son."

Hearing that a friend of the old Geneva days, Mrs. Adeline Higbee, was very ill, Mother wrote her the following long letter:

MY DEAR FRIEND:

An old friend of mine is spending the winter in Los Angeles, and she told me the other day that word had reached her that you were not feeling well and not able to carry on your usual activities, so I am wondering if, while you are resting and recruiting, you might not enjoy having a few lines from me.

When I look back on the years that both of us spent in Geneva, I can see that we each had secret sorrows and disappointments, but at the same time we had some pretty good times, and life was not altogether barren and dreary. I do not think the least little thing ever occurred that is not still vivid in my memory in the life of the town, of our literary group, of the church work, or any ramifi-



cation of our daily existence. I certainly would enjoy talking over old times. I have not been back to Geneva in many years. Each year life grows increasingly busy. It was not so long after you left Geneva that I left also. I went up to the northern part of the state on an exquisitely beautiful strip of lake shore and bought one hundred and twenty acres, where I built a workshop and started a wild-flower garden that ran to the proportion of twenty thousand specimens, most of which I located and collected in the wild, aside from keeping up with my writing.

I loved this location and should have remained there to live and to die had not the question of help become utterly impossible in the country. The house was a big structure containing about twenty rooms, and to keep it equipped with the modern conveniences of lighting, heating, and water required specially trained men that I could not secure in the woods. The war was a horrible time, and I ended by breaking down with the flu with no nurse and a doctor forty miles away. In desperation, I fled to California, and I have been here during the winter ever since. Last fall I offered the place on the lake shore to our state for a bird and wild-flower preserve, offering to donate to the state my work and a small fortune in timber that the place contains if they would reimburse me for the expense of the buildings and the cost of bringing in and setting the wild things that I had gathered there. I have not yet had an answer to this proposition. Some of the prominent state officials are working on it. I hope that it will go through.

In the meantime, halfway up the side of the Santa Monica hills on the south, six miles from the sea, and about a twenty-minute ride out from where I now live in



the city of Los Angeles, I have bought five or six acres of baby mountain with a little cañon on either side, and on top of this, with a fine view of the ocean and the entire city of Los Angeles and its surrounding suburbs, I am planning to build me another workshop. I shall use an exterior form that, I hope, looks like California and will not drive away the birds which are thick in the shrubbery over the mountain and in the cañons. The little piece is untouched, and I hope to fix me a workshop here in which to end my days, close to the sea and with more sunshine than I ever have found any place else in my experience with this lovely world. I am using the plans of the Cabin at the lake, switched around a little differently, and I am going to build a projection room for moving pictures and lantern slides for my picture interests.

Mr. Porter is here for the winter, and with the exception of my secretary, we are all alone. A niece I have had with me for the past eight years is away in school. Jeannette now lives about a mile from me with her two little girls and a new husband to whom she has been married for the past six months. He is a man with whom I was associated for two years in my picture interests before he and Jeannette were married. He is a very fine youngster in every particular, and they are very happy together. He takes great interest in helping with the training of her two little girls, one aged ten, the other twelve.

There also lives here a favourite niece of mine, Cosette Patrick, with her family; another niece and her family live very close to me; my eldest brother and his wife live about a mile away, and I also have some cousins here, so

that I come nearer being among my own people here than I have anywhere that I ever have lived.

I like it in California unspeakably because I love being out all the year round. I understand that at this time people are freezing to death and snowbound where I lived when we were acquainted with each other, but here I am wearing exactly the same clothes that I wore at the lake in July and August, riding every day, bareheaded if I choose. There is a basket of sweet peas from my own garden on my dresser. We have had roses all winter; the orange and the almond trees are blooming, and the apricots and the fruit orchards will be along presently. We are only a few miles from the sea where we go to fish and to bathe and to picnic on the sand. The roads are like barn floors, and I have two automobiles and a driver, so that I can get out whenever I have the time.

One feature about Los Angeles that I particularly love is the chance for association with all kinds of creative artists, a thing I never before have had. I certainly do love a number of the writers, the painters, the musicians, and the sculptors that I meet here. This is the element that my life has always been deprived of previously. Next to the sunshine, I appreciate it the most of anything in California. I certainly wish that all of my friends could be here.

Concerning the work that I have done, I think the books now run to the neighbourhood of nineteen. For the past three years I have written regularly for *McCall's*. I have been interested in helping a youngster pull this publication from a loss of thirty-five thousand dollars to its owners the year he took the editorship,

to an earning capacity over all expenses paid and a large profit to its owners. It has been an interesting job, and I have had lots of fun with my share of it.

This year I am writing each month for *Good House-keeping* and I also greatly enjoy this work. I have made a practice of doing a book every other year, and a year ago I began with my own company, under my own supervision, to make pictures from my stories in order to get them on the screen with fidelity to themselves and to my idea of how a moving picture should be made.

As the years go by I can see myself changing. I am sorry that we are not where we could have the pleasure of knowing each other now. I really am quite a respectable person by this time. Life has moulded me and hammered me and taught me and punished me and delighted me until I have deepened and broadened so that I would be very much more worth while as a friend than I could possibly have been as the narrow-minded, bigoted creature that you knew. I have tried with all my might to keep sane, to keep sweet, to be true to my friends and just to my enemies. Knowing you as I knew you years ago, I know that you would be infinitely more worth while, because you always were a growing concern. I know that you have kept your faith in God and your love of your fellow man, and I know that you have lived your life so that if, at any hour, a call should come to step up higher, you would be fearless and ready, even as I am. I have kept fairly well in touch with you throughout the years through people who have corresponded with you, and through Lorene's friendship with Lucretia; and so I know probably as much about what has happened to you as you know concerning me. When I think over the old days, I cannot help feeling that we had

a good deal of fun. I remember the Fourth of July that ended in Lucretia's accident to her eyes that frightened all of us so dreadfully, and I recall the day I insisted on visiting all afternoon with you and discovered at the end of the visit that you had been wild to make preparations for dinner guests that were soon to arrive! And to-day I can hear the sound of your voice in laughter, and I can see myself peeping through the flowers of the conservatory to locate you as you leaned against the wall outside holding my first loaf of bread that I had driven full of nails—huge spikes left from the logs of the Cabin! But do you recall that after I learned that I was not to put the yeast on ice what very lovely bread I did make? I certainly wish that I had some of it now. If we could not do anything else in those days, we surely could cook. It makes my mouth water to think of the good food that we ate.

Now I must close and go on with my mail. The days grow increasingly busy, and instead of getting easier, my job is enlarging until at the present minute I really need two secretaries instead of one, and I never have been able to cut a mass of correspondence as my family and friends seem to feel that I should. I should love to see you and Lucretia and her little family, and all my friends of the old Geneva days. To all of them and to you I send every friendly, loving wish. If you can find time, write me a few lines and tell me how life is going on with you.

As ever your friend,

GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

## *Chapter XXV*

### A WORKSHOP ON CATALINA ISLAND

EARLY in 1924 Mother began plans for the building of two California homes, one in Avalon, Santa Catalina Island, and the other in Bel-Air, West Los Angeles, a five-acre tract of land in the hills six miles from the ocean. She was very enthusiastic in developing the plans for these homes, and of the Bel-Air location she writes:

"There is a pair of mocking birds courting on the chimney straight in line of my vision, and back of them are the Gothic spires of one of the most beautiful churches in the world, and back of them are the Santa Monica hills. It is a day of rain—rain for which California has prayed frantically for two months, and out on my little mountain the incense shrubs are in bloom: so we are going to have spring in no time.

"I cannot remember whether I told you of buying five acres of land out in the hills about six miles from the ocean on a little baby mountain halfway down the side of the range with a highly interesting growth of native timber and flowers on it. On the mountain I am going to set my workshop, fashioned much like Limberlost Cabin in size and arrangement, but differing from it in architecture, as it must to conform to this location; and around it I am going to begin growing the wild flowers of California. I want it, also, as I want any spot on which I live, to become a sanctuary for the birds. I go out



several times a week, when I can find a little time, and gather rare things off the surrounding mountains where they are going to make roads and destroy stuff, and move it over to my mountain. The land has been untouched since the beginning of time, and it is my plan to keep it in its wild state with the exception of an acre or two at the back for a small orchard and garden in order that I may have a fresh selection of grapes and fruits that I like best. It is going to make a wonderfully beautiful place. Part of it is valley, part rocky formation, and a lovely gentle slope at the back. In front there is a wonderful view of the ocean, and on a clear day Catalina Island can be plainly seen.

"I got keen joy yesterday out of ploughing up perhaps half an acre at the foot of the mountain, having it harrowed, and sowing it in wild-flower seed. While I was doing this I made the acquaintance of a California jay, which is certainly a brilliant bird, and a pair of brown velvet thrushes who followed down the rows and ate wild-flower seed about as fast as I could sow it. And I also had the pleasure of leaving inviolate the home of Mr. and Mrs. Trade Rat, and I advanced some way in forming an acquaintance with them. I observed that they have rounder noses, shorter, broader tails, and are larger than our Eastern rats, and they have a very docile, friendly disposition. It seems that they steal every bright thing they can lay their teeth on, but they never take anything without making a return gift. The entrance to their tunnel is covered with a mass of wild stuff as big around as a washtub and two or three feet in height. It is an interesting collection of weed stems, little sticks, reeds, long bright grasses, yucca seeds, the lace of wild cucumber seed pods, nutshells, acorns, bits of



wire and string, bright pebbles, anything and everything, all heaped up in a most interesting manner.

"I often take my work out to the location where there is the loveliest cañon that I ever have seen in all my life, bar none. My driver has made me a table and benches out of rough boards, and Frances and I work there in the open with the birds and the wild flowers all about us and the clean smell of the sage in our nostrils. I am more deeply convinced than ever that this is the only place I have seen in California where I really wanted to build a home, a place so exactly suited to the requirements of the work I dream of doing there; and I have long since decided that I so love California that this is the land in which I wish to finish my living and to do my dying."

Of the summer place she wrote:

"Yesterday Jeannette, Leo, and I went to Catalina on business concerning the new home there. I nearly fell dead when I found a fourteen-room house built of the finest redwood lumber I ever have seen. It is an exquisite terra-cotta pink. It is the quickest piece of work and the cleanest piece of work I have ever seen in my life. The views from some of the windows are unspeakably lovely. From my bedroom I can lie on my pillow and look out across the Pacific Ocean, and to the north I have a lovely view toward the St. Catherine Hotel.

"I am perfectly enchanted with this beauty spot of the world. There are huge trees on my site, and it is only a short distance from the mountains on one hand and the sea on the other. The air is perfectly clean and cool, with a salt tang that is delicious, and there have developed on these mountains some floral specimens that

are found nowhere else on earth. I have bought an extra lot upon which to make a garden of these, and I hope we shall have great fun in collecting them. Then I want to make them into a little booklet. There is one poppy that belongs to the island, a trumpet creeper, and another vine having a purple flower shaped much like a cultivated foxglove and coloured exactly like it, though not so plethoric, but having a smaller tube very artistically cut like a slender Greek urn. I want to put these three creepers on my front fence and the others into the garden beds. And when I get them all collected and get all the lore concerning the island, I will have material for something very attractive.

"We spent one day of our trip fishing from the dock of the St. Catherine Hotel, and had excellent luck; I secured a specimen of every kind of fish that can be caught from the dock. Our stringer was as brilliant as a wreath of flowers, all yellow and pink and blue and delicate greens and reds. The kelp fish had flaming red eyes with a blood-red line around them. The blue perch had exquisite blue eyes. The calico bass had wonderful pale emerald-green eyes. The sculpin had an eye like a human being, the pupil being of a dull, coppery colour and the iris very large and beautiful aquamarine.

"There are no breakers in the Bay of Avalon, so the kiddies will have a splendid place for bathing this summer. And because it is so still, it is the bluest water and the clearest water I ever have seen, one being able to see with the naked eye to unbelievable depths where kelp one hundred feet in height with leaves the length of an average-sized room is growing; where big fish glide among them, and sea anemones and cucumbers and abalone shells lie on the bottom in gardens of the sea

whose unsurpassed beauty must be seen to be understood."

The Catalina house was completed in June, and Mother moved into it for the summer, taking me with her and, of course, my family, to which had been added a baby boy. A letter to her friends, the Cochranes, tells of her first summer on the island:

MY DEAR JANE:

Your latest letter was forwarded to an island out in the Pacific Ocean that is just a little gem stuck up in the sea, twenty miles long and ranging from one to ten miles in width. It seems to be full of veins of pure white marble, of black and green marble, of jade and of turquoise, quite a bit of iron, and one vein of silver is now being developed into what is thought will be a wonderful silver mine. There is also some gold, and more exquisitely coloured stones than I ever have seen before on any stretch of seashore I ever have visited.

Some of the mountains run up to over two thousand feet above sea level, and these mountains and the canons between are covered with all sorts of flowers and foliage, with enthusiastic little mountain streams and lots of birds.

The island lies eighteen miles off the coast of California and in the stiller waters of this big channel between the coast and the island lies a great fishing ground. Here a huge swordfish was caught this summer, a fish weighing close to seven hundred pounds. And there are sea bass almost as large. Whales go spouting by, and there is a colony of seals at the south end of the island. The heavy tides break on the west side. On the east there is a big bay in which lies the town of Avalon. Two

blocks from the beach I bought two lots and a half, and built a summer home that I am going to send you some pictures of as soon as I get it developed to a state that will do it justice in pictures.

I came over the latter part of June and my daughter came straight from the hospital with her little new baby, a fine little son, over whom we are all so pleased we scarcely know how to express ourselves. As I have been taking care of four girls for a good many years, a boy certainly is a welcome change. He is a beautiful baby, but I go around with cold feet for fear they will kill him. You won't believe this, Jane, but it's the gospel truth. There has never been anything on the youngster's feet; a stitch of wool has never touched him. He's got on a little thin cotton shirt, a little Balbriggan shirt over that, with a diaper pinned to it, either to hold the shirt down or the diaper up, I am not sure which. And right here I beg you to hold your breath and calm yourself; if it hits you as hard as it does me, there is danger. Not another stitch but little rompers that stop at the knees and at the elbows! And they are as likely to be blue, or pink, or lavender as they are to be white. I leave it to you if you ever heard of such heresy. And with his little bare arms and his bare legs and feet kicking all day, he is as fine a specimen of physical babyhood as you ever laid your eyes on. Plump, with rosy cheeks, he's never sneezed once, nor had anything at all the matter with him. He eats and sleeps most of his time, never lifting up his voice to cry unless he is needing changing or is hungry. Can you beat it? I am going to enclose you a little picture of him, if I can find one that does him justice.

Lying in my bed at night, I can hear the bleating of a flock of six thousand wild goats that probably evolved

with the island. There are big, bold eagles sailing above on the affairs of love; seals playing over the rocks; and every kind of water bird ever thought of, from funny little sandpipers tilting along the sands, to great pelicans with a three- or four-foot sweep of wing, and white gulls. I am crazy about the mountains, the sea, and the low-hung stars; and the air is the freshest, the cleanest that I ever have had to breathe in all my experience with this world.

I am having great fun going in motor boats around the shore line, trailing a rowboat and going in it to explore the coves and caves; and I have been finding some slabs of marble. There are bays where there are rocks of bright blue and snow-white and blood-red, and greens and pinks and yellows, and every other colour and combination you could imagine. You never could dream how lovely the great overhanging cliffs of brilliant colour and the clear green water around the shore line are. The other day from a boat I noticed a flock of white gulls flying over one of these exquisite light jade-green bays. They took the colour from the water on their under parts, and they went past us a flock of delicate jade-green birds. This was something I never before had seen in nature.

I like it here so well that in a few days now I am going to begin on my winter's work. I have a good cook and a chauffeur and a little field car with me, and when I am not busy writing I can go up into the mountains as far as I can by car, and, with a little Yaqui Indian and my driver, I collect things to plant around the house, which is built entirely of redwood with an oil finish instead of paint, the interior beautiful natural woods, with two stone fireplaces, one of which is unusually lovely.



I like the quiet and the big immensities of the mountains and the sea, and I think, maybe, when you say your prayers, if you will ask the Lord to help me, I can do some bigger and better work here than I ever have done before.

The Bel-Air house is coming on fine. Three weeks ago I was in the upstairs and in every room projected for the building. They are promising it for Christmas, but I have not my heart set on that, and do not in the least expect that it will be ready. I hope it is going to be comfortable, and I know that the grounds are going to be lovely. Through any of the windows, on a clear day, I can see long stretches of the ocean, and, very prominently, Catalina Island, where my summer workshop is. It is going to be a big job to get the goods I brought from Limberlost Cabin out of storage and get fixed up, but I love to do that sort of thing, and am expecting to get considerable enjoyment out of it, and I truly love planning the grounds. It has been rather a job to plan and build two houses at once, but I have managed it and kept up my magazine work as well, and I hope to come out without any difficulty with my work for the winter.

There is going to be a new book early in the coming year, of nature stuff, a reprint of magazine articles that I have been publishing in *Good Housekeeping* under the title of *Tales You Won't Believe*. I very much wish that I could have a copy to send you for next Christmas, but I am afraid that it will not be possible, as the series does not finish in the magazine till February and the book dare not be given general circulation before, but I have a feeling that you and Robert are going to like this book about as well as anything I ever have done.



My kindest remembrances to you both.

As ever your friend,

GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

Most of that summer Mother spent with a stone mason and his two helpers constructing a fountain in the yard. She writes:

"Here it is August again and I am knee-deep in my annual orgy of stonework. Believe me, if we ever thought we had stone in Indiana, you ought to see the stone that at the present minute I am fishing out of the Pacific Ocean! They have got even the best of the 'pudden stone' skinned off the map, and they are not only white, red, and blue, but they are green and yellow and purple and rose colour and every other colour the Lord ever made. To-day I hired a little steamer which my driver piloted, and Leo and a Mexican went with us. We found a little cove of the most brilliant colour I ever have seen in nature. The walls are as red as a dark red beet in many places. There are stones of turquoise blue, and all sorts of green shades and queer yellows. Big pieces of this stone have fallen down and been rolled back and forth in the water until they are rounded up so that there are no sharp corners, and there are tiny pebbles of every conceivable colour, and the water is the same absolutely clear, transparent green and blue of Avalon Bay, and over all this bed of brilliant pebbles, and with these walls of various colours in the back, this little cove is the loveliest thing I ever have seen in my whole life.

"I wish you might have been with me when I climbed out on a stone ledge roofing over a great cave going back the Lord knows how deep into the heart of the mountain. The great waves came tearing up, went roar-

ing through the narrow aperture, and then boomed in tones of thunder when they struck a wall somewhere deep in the heart of the mountain, and then, as they came racing out again, they met an incoming wave that shot spray many feet into the air, and the water was as blue as the deepest blue sky you ever have seen, and a lovely turquoise green around the shore where it broke into foam over rocks of deep blue and blood red and sage green and all sorts of delicate colours. And the waves carried in wonderful shells and strange seaweeds, and a big bald eagle flew so low over my head I could almost have reached up and touched him.

"I have just finished building what I think is a very beautiful fountain. The basin I lined with stones from the sea. The back wall runs three or four feet in height and is mostly made of mountain stones, and I have used a large number of very beautiful sea shells in such a way that the water falls from one to the other and makes it sing beautifully for the height of the back wall. I have also arranged both back and front so that there are a number of pockets in which to set ferns and other attractive flowers native to the island.

"I had a good stone mason and his assistant on the job. The mason is a Bohemian. He has travelled nearly all over the world and speaks half a dozen languages. He was sent with instructions to do what I wanted, and he did his level best on the job. His assistant is a little black-haired Yaqui Indian named Isadore. Isadore and I are great friends. Yesterday I gave him a dollar extra if he would carry a seven-foot clump of cat-tails that I was moving to my fountain through the growth of the mountain side without breaking the stems. Isadore going down the mountain looked like a little sprawling

spider with a black head carrying a flag pole with no banner unfurled.

"The big flat stepping stones I wrote you about are laid in cement, but I decided to fill the cracks between with tiny pebbles that we found along the beaches. When I got that done to-day so that nobody could slip between the stones and break a leg, I went upstairs and took a bath and put on one of my new dresses and touched up my complexion and curled my hair, and then I came down in the yard and said something to Isadore. He has very bright eyes and a face that makes me think of a monkey every time I look at him, until he smiles, and that smile is so contagious that everybody on the island answers to it. When I spoke to him, he stared at me from head to foot, his brow knitted, and he hesitated a moment, and then he said in a voice of slow wonder: 'Why—you? *You?*' and you could have heard me laugh for half a block! The point to it is that Isadore never before had seen me except in boots and breeches, in an old pongee blouse, with my sleeves rolled up, and my hair in pretty disreputable condition, and I think the only thing he recognised about me was my voice!"

It was Mother's boast that the fountain sang thirty-two different little songs in as many shells, and from this she gave her home the name "Singing Water." It may be heard across the street, and at night she loved the rippling little song that lulled her to sleep.

She also constructed that summer a stone pedestal on which was placed a giant clam shell from the China Sea which was filled with water for a bird bath; and another pedestal the top of which was level paved in tiny, bright-

coloured stones, so that it served for a sundial and also as a dining table for the birds.

In the meantime, Mr. Meehan, who had by this time become her literary agent and the supervisor of her pictures, as well as her son-in-law, superintended the building of the home at Bel-Air during Mother's absence. She made two trips to Los Angeles that summer to look at the house and to see the première of her second motion picture, *A Girl of the Limberlost*. She writes:

"I was in Los Angeles to be present and to make a speech at the opening of *A Girl of the Limberlost* at one of the big down-town theatres in Los Angeles. The managers of the theatre tell me that it has done the best business of any picture since they had control of the theatre, and they also reported to me that on Labour Day they had the biggest house and made the most money that has been earned by any picture in the history of the theatre.

"While in Los Angeles I went out to Bel-Air. With all my eyes I looked at the foundations. The framework was up with crude stairways and rough flooring, and all the rooms were outlined; but to save my soul I had not the faintest idea as to whether the building was being properly put up or not. They do these things so differently in California. Building as we do in the East is not necessary in this land of sunshine and moderate weather; so I just made up my mind that since I had hired the best architect I could and had Leo to overlook the progress of the house, I would go back to Catalina and leave them on their job until they reached the point of woodwork and finish and wall decoration.

"A week ago the Meehans went back to get the children ready for school, but I am making my plans to stay here in the quiet and peace of the island and get the best start I can on my winter's work. Personally, I am in love with the island and with the village, which is infinitely more charming since the happy summer crowds have departed. I love the atmosphere of the mountains; and I love the majesty of the sea; and I love the big, low-hung stars, the daily sunshine, and the cool nights. I think above everything else I love the absolutely clean air with its refreshing salty odours from the sea."



## *Chapter XXVI*

### "THE KEEPER OF THE BEES" AND "THE MAGIC GARDEN"

AFTER I had gone back to Los Angeles with the children in time to put them in school, Mother sent for two secretaries and began work in earnest. She always said she could do more work in Avalon than anywhere else, partly because she was not interrupted, and partly because she so loved the spot that it was a source of continual inspiration.

If you had happened to be wandering through the hills back of the little village any time during September, 1924; and if your shoes of adventure had coaxed you up the little cañon farther than the trail leads, you might have found yourself struggling through the cactus and sage until you came upon a little open spot in the brush, surrounded by a group of small live oaks. There you would have seen a strange sight—a sight so strange that a flock of huge black ravens were sending cautious calls to each other across the sky; Mother Quail gathered her brood more closely around her; and a herd of mountain goats peered inquiringly through the brush; for swinging between two of the sturdiest oaks there hung a dark green hammock, and motionless, clad in an unobtrusive costume, a figure lay in the hammock. A cane which was always carried afield stood against a tree; a hat, a floppy South American Panama, was flung carelessly beside it; a soft, low voice droned incessantly, and sometimes the hammock swayed, rocked gently by the breeze. On a blanket

near by sat another figure, motionless, too, save for the constant flying of busy fingers as they took the dictation. On near-by trees and bushes were wired abalone shells filled with water, seeds, crumbs, apples, potato, and hard-boiled eggs which birds love. Day after day, as the birds and animals became more accustomed to this programme, they grew venturesome, came closer, and ate the food provided for them. The bees and butterflies did not interrupt their daily routine of honey gathering.

The figure in the hammock, as you have already guessed, was Mother, and it was amid such surroundings and environment that she wrote *The Keeper of the Bees*, *The Magic Garden*, and the *McCall* editorials for many months ahead. She loved open spaces, and because she could work better with the sky for her roof, she chose the out-of-doors for her study. Her inspirations were the lazy hum of the bees, the chirp of the birds, the blue haze hanging over the hills, and the flecks of sunlight dancing through the trees. Working thus, she accomplished more than she had ever done before during the same space of time writing indoors.

*The Keeper of the Bees* was written for her little granddaughter Gene. Several years before, when she wrote *Morning Face* for the other granddaughter, she had promised Gene that some day she should have a book, too; so into the "Little Scout" she wove the actual character and disposition of Gene and dedicated the book to her. She constantly watched Gene at her work and at her play, and accompanied her to many baseball games and other sports, just to hear the little girl's comments and note her reactions. Having in her immediate family a member of the American Legion, the problems of the present-day returned soldier were constantly before her,

and these, together with her knowledge of bees, furnished the foundation for the story.

She wrote of the book:

“As for the story itself, I hope you will like it, but, of course, one can never tell how anything is going to strike the public until it reaches them. I had my reasons for writing *The White Flag*. Ever since I have been writing I have had it pitched at me that I was too romantic, that my stories were too sweet, that the people I depicted were imaginary, even when I was describing my father and mother and the home in which I lived, or one of my field assistants, or experiences that I had had afield. So I thought I would show the dear critics that I could write a little blood and thunder if I wanted to. If you do not believe that story is the truth, kindly think back to Wabash days.

“The weather here has been perfectly exquisite up until the past three days, when we are beginning to have some rain. I am planning to stay until about the last week of this month. I want to finish the book here and I would like to do three or four more editorials so that my decks would be clear when I get back to Los Angeles, because, when I do reach there, I will want to go on the job of the woodwork and the wall finishing, the fences and the front walk, and the development of my baby mountain, which is exactly six miles from the Pacific Ocean, a matter of about fifteen minutes to the sands of the beach and the sea. And the love that I am developing for the sands of the beach and the ocean is something that reaches very deep in the roots of my being. I cannot explain it, but it seems to get every one else the same way, and I think it would you if you were here to experi-

ence constantly these beautiful days of brilliant sunshine, the blue of the sky, and the deeper blue of the ocean, and the unceasing sweep of the waves, while as to shoreline, the island of Santa Catalina exceeds anything that I ever have seen in beauty. There are places where the beach is so unspeakably lovely that I do not know how to go to work to tell you; and I do not intend to try, because it will only be a few months until you will be coming to see.

"When we really work, Frances and I have learned that the thing to do is to roll up our blankets and hit it for the peace and the grandeur, for the silence of the mountains; and the higher up we get, and the quieter it is, the closer I can get to God and the big, primal, vital things of life. If you do not believe it, watch the work that I have done in the month beginning with the Christmas article for *McCall's* which was the first, and going on to the January one and the new book.

"I thoroughly enjoy myself when I have a piece of stonework on my hands. I know what you think about this, and I know what my family says behind my back when I get out with a bunch of men and build springs and gate posts and fireplaces and fountains; and none of my family realises that it is the outdoor exercise, the stooping and the lifting, the wading in the ocean, the contact with men who have red blood in their veins who are working at day labour for the wives and the little children whom they love, who furnish me in very large part with the material that I use. I made trips up the ocean for the stone for the fountain; displayed familiarity for a Bohemian and a Spaniard and a Yaqui Indian who helped on the fountain; and held long conversations with a big Scotch girl who is a teacher of Americanism in the schools of Los Angeles.

“Yesterday I sent for Leo to read the first draught of my new book. When he got through with it, he pronounced it equally as fine as *The Harvester*. He said, in fact, that it went a little bit beyond *The Harvester* because the Harvester was a pagan who worshipped the woods and the outdoors, while the man of this story was a Christian who worshipped God.

“The thing that always has been said of my work is that I could make scenes and people very real. The reason I can make scenes real is because I do not attempt to lay any scene that I do not know backward and forward from the ground up; and I do not attempt to write about people until I have seen them sweat and tug and watched the workings of their brains and the workings of their hearts; and by and by, when I put them onto paper, I have something that people recognise as something that is alive, and incidentally, I have not used as yet half of the material that I collected this summer. In the meantime, I have the best working small fountain that I have ever seen, and the stone that I have used in its construction is something perfectly wonderful.

“The island here is almost a little jewel. There are places where, in the upheaval that left it above the water, iron has run out in liquid streams and hardened and solidified and coloured the stone that was also running in liquid form at the same time, and lots of it is in huge pieces and as red as freshly shed blood; and lots of it is as blue as the deepest sky you ever saw; and some of it is yellow; and some of it is pink; and there are wonderful greys and greens and all sorts of formations and different shapes and comminglings. Here there is a world of shells. I have one big case I am going to fill with some. When I send your Christmas box, I will put



in some so that you may see what I mean. Some of them are so beautiful I use them on my dressing table for pins and hairpins.

"I am enclosing a picture of the fountain in the course of construction. The man down inside is the Bohemian named Victor; the man next to him in the big hat is my chauffeur; the next party you will know; and the one beyond me is a Spaniard named Raphael, almost as handsome a specimen of physical manhood as I have ever seen. He owns some silver mines in Mexico and comes up here and works in summer and goes back there and works on his silver mines in winter. Since this picture was made there is a walk running around the fountain finished with fancy stones on the edge. The water comes out in six or seven places pretty well to the top, and it falls on shells and platforms and spills down to the surface of the pool so that you can hear it any hour of the day or night, falling and singing quite as loud as the water in Pacoima cañon. At the back where we are standing there are built in the masonry six deep flower pockets that we are going to fill with flowers and vines; and back of that we are going to plant some shrubs native to the island.

"I want to build yet a sundial, a feeding tray for the birds, and a bird bath, and plant some native vines on the front fence, which is much better looking than the side fence that you see in the picture. And after that I am going to carpet the rest of the ground with pebbles from the beautifully coloured beaches. When I get it in, I think it is going to be as pretty as a picture.

"Now this is a big letter for a busy woman, and don't you ask for another one for about three weeks, because

you aren't going to get it! I've so much to do that none of the days are long enough.

“With devoted love,

“As ever your sister,

“GENE.”

*The Magic Garden* was a shorter story concerning the problems of children of divorced parents, a condition in which Mother was much interested and which she had studied a great deal. By writing it she hoped to influence parents to continue living together for the sake of the children whenever it was possible; and when it became impossible, to remind them that both father and mother still owed a duty to the children.

During October Mr. Meehan wrote an adaptation for the screening of *The Keeper of the Bees*, of which Mother approved. It was made early because they hoped to have the book published serially, in book form, and the picture made all during the same year.

Mother returned to Los Angeles in November because she wished to superintend personally the construction of two fireplaces for her Bel-Air home, stone for which she had shipped from Indiana. Again she worked with the stone mason all during his eight-hour day, telling him how she wished each stone placed, taking her lunch with her and eating it with the workmen. She wrote a verse for the inscription of the keystone in the library fireplace which was characteristic of her love for birds and flowers:

Mother Mary, seek the King,  
Ask of Him a matchless thing:  
Grant to this, my working place,  
A wealth of wings and flower grace.

After the completion of the fireplaces, Mother took two motor trips with my husband and myself which she greatly enjoyed. We went first to Lake Arrowhead, stopping at Riverside—Mother loved the Inn there—on our way home; and later to San Francisco by way of the Santa Cruz mountains and through the big trees of that locality. During our stay in San Francisco, she went with us on her first trip through Muir Wood, and there she became lost from the party through following a little winding stream that led away from the path taken by the guide. When we finally located her, she was so awed by the grandeur of the trees, by the odour of the thick carpet of pine needles, by the flowers and the gorgeous ferns, that she had forgotten all about time and the existence of the rest of the party.

We returned home the fourth of December.

## Chapter XXVII

### HER CORRESPONDENTS AND HER CRITICS

DURING Mother's life she received a tremendous amount of mail—and *all* of it she answered. When it grew to such proportions that it was a burden to her, and she spent many hours with it which should have been devoted to rest or recreation, we tried to induce her to allow a secretary to answer it. She only looked at us with her slow smile and said: "But these letters are from my friends, who trust me. They expect an answer. I cannot disappoint them." And we had no adequate answer to that.

After all, her letters were her applause, and one must have encouragement to pursue any work happily and successfully. An author must depend on letters, criticisms, and reviews for approval or disapproval, and only too often critics are mistaken. They sit, smug and secure, barricaded by their own self-sufficiency, and write criticisms, bounded by their own scope of knowledge and their own experience, for the world to read. But the busy mother or harassed business man, the ambitious youngster or unfortunate criminal, who sits down and writes from his heart, for the *author's* eyes alone, what he thinks, and when such letters come from all over the civilised world, *then* you get a real basis from which to judge what your writing is really doing. Such people are the unpaid critics, who play no favourites; who are influenced by nothing; who have nothing to gain or lose by

what they say. Such people write from the heart, and they send in the opinions that are really valuable to an author. Mother once wrote to me on this subject:

"I scarcely know what to think of the writer who failed to answer your letter. Surely no one could be busier than one who is wife, mother, housekeeper, author, and artist all in one; but I never yet have failed to send a decent letter in reply to any one who was so good as to take the trouble to express their appreciation of my work. My sin is that I do it on the machine; I never could if I used a pen. One thing I know: the writer who fails to answer such letters never knows what he or she misses. I would not give up letters I get from some friends of my work for anything on earth. They are my very greatest comfort. They take me over the blue days, and the doubtful hours, and the tired body renews its strength from them. Of course, I know they are from people who think too highly of what I can do, but it helps me that some one does just cut loose and love me for my work.

"Recently a woman wrote me that one of my books in the hands of a young brother of nineteen, who had been left in her care by a dying mother, had made him 'see things in a different light,' and he was cutting former habits and friends off squarely and making a 'perfect man' of himself. Maybe you think my soul didn't just shout and sing with joy, and maybe I won't think of that boy the next time I pick up a pen to write!

"A woman from the lowest tip of Africa sent me some exquisite white feathers, priceless things, because she had been reading one of my bird books, and she paid me about the biggest compliment I ever had when she wrote—'not because I know or care much about birds, but because I



read your stuff for your literary values and the glimpses of personality it affords.'

"From across the ocean and around the globe they come, these dear letters from lovers of my work, and because of them I go on, though tired and always failing to write the great book I would like. Oh, I should like to tell the woman or man who failed to answer you that they miss half the joy of life. Why, a woman wrote me a few days ago that she so loved my work that she would 'stand between me and the horrors of execution if she could'!

"Last night came a letter from an English teacher in Peking, China, in which is this sentence:

I have not said what I wanted to say—very well—but I thought it might bring a wee bit of comfort to you to know you were blessing us here in China.

And by the next mail, this from the wife of a professor of Jamestown, Cape Providence:

But I must not ask you questions, as it would be quite too much to expect an answer, as you must be always very busy; but I just want you to know what pleasure and profit your works are to many in Africa.

And a third from a professor of literature asking the privilege of translating *A Girl of the Limberlost* into Arabic for use in the schools of Egypt in an effort to introduce there our methods of Nature study. Those three letters, out of hundreds from the globe around, would have irradiated my father's brow with glory, and he would have cried: 'Praise the Lord, my soul is satisfied!'

"It is one of life's darkest tragedies with me that he never saw even the first of these brain grandchildren of his. That he would have loved them well I know, for

he is written into, through, and all over them, and his law of life and love inspires each line, while things the plucky little mother said and did he would recognise on each page."

Concerning her critics, criticisms, and reviews Mother once wrote:

"With my first novel, after having been told by three publishers that it would sell barely enough to pay expenses if I left the nature work in, my reply was to leave it as I thought a book should be written, and if it did not bring me over six hundred dollars, I would cut down my necessities to that sum and never lift my voice to complain. That was a good guess, for my first check from *Freckles* was exactly six hundred dollars, and I had many less than that before, advertised like Pears' soap 'by its loving friends,' at seven years of age the book advanced on the line of best sellers.

"During the hard exposed field work of those early years, during rainy days and many nights in the dark room, with the full knowledge that I was throwing away money every day so spent, I went straight ahead with field work, sending around the globe for books, delving and studying in brain-racking work by the hour to secure material for such books as *Birds of the Bible*, *Music of the Wild*, and *Moths of the Limberlost*. Every second spent in such strenuous physical and mental work was 'commercially' thrown away. Publishers did not fail to tell me, and I had some small perception of my own, but that was the work I could do, and do better, pictorially, than any other woman has as yet had the strength and nerve to do it; that was the work in which I gloried, and I did it. My faith that it will yet come into its own is as

strong as was the faith of Walt Whitman in *Leaves of Grass*.

"Very recently I sighted the dawn of a new day when a famous Scotch critic wrote me that a great publishing house in London and Edinburgh wished to buy out a complete edition of my five nature books. This could not be arranged at that time because they were in the hands of three houses. These have since been limited to two, and if the day ever arrives when it narrows to one and I may have my British edition, it will surely be the happiest of my life as a field worker. But had I been working for money, not one of those five books ever would have been written or one picture made.

"When the public had discovered me and given my idea of a book generous approval, and after such successes as *A Girl of the Limberlost* and *The Harvester*, did I prove my commercialism by dropping nature work and plunging headlong into the books that it would pay to write and pay publishers to publish? Such books as *Music of the Wild* and *Moths of the Limberlost* are the answer. No argument is necessary: the things I have done prove my position for me, yet among the astute critics of the day, Edward Schuman, formerly of the *Chicago Record-Herald*, is the one and only critic who ever thought of or pointed out this fact, so far as I know. It actually did appeal to Mr. Schuman, when *Moths of the Limberlost* came in for review following *The Harvester*, that had I been working for money I could have written a half a dozen more *Harvesters* instead of putting the labour of seven years of field work on a scientific subject into a book.

"Now about these book children of mine. They were conceived in deep and enduring love. They were given

every opportunity in my power before and after birth. They are sound, sane, healthy children. There is not a line in one of them that I would blush to have my father read. I am perfectly willing to let time and the hearts of the people set them in their ultimate place. I have no delusions concerning them. I know a little bit about literary values myself; so I know where they line up and where they fail in the estimate of the critic who judges a book on its framework and its fidelity to the worst in human nature. To save me, I cannot see why a book that tells of womanly women and clean men, if it be true to types that live, or have lived, is not as great a book, indeed a much greater book, than one which wends its way through five or six hundred pages describing illicit love, predominant appetites, broken vows, wasted life, the very worst in human nature indiscriminately spread abroad for those who chance upon it to read.

"To my way of thinking and working, the greatest service a piece of fiction can do any reader is to force him to lay it down with a higher ideal of life than he had when he took it up. If in one small degree it shows him where he can be a gentler, saner, cleaner, kinder man, it is a wonder-working book. If it opens his eyes to one beauty in nature he never saw before and leads him one step toward the God of the Universe, it is a beneficial book, for one step into the miracles of nature leads to that long walk, the glories of which so strengthen even a boy who thinks he is dying that he faces his battle like a gladiator. And a miracle through such courage may be wrought for others, as it was for that one boy, who, in his plucky fight to face death 'as Freckles did,' gained strength enough to live instead.

"Does any one think it matters much to me what a professional critic says of my work, so long as boys by the thousand send me word that a book of mine has helped them to meet the struggles of life with more strength and showed them how to die with braver spirit? Do I care much what these same critics say when girls send me heaps of mail telling me that life has been easier for them since they learned how one girl lived it? Does it mean nothing to me that men the globe around have written me confidential letters to tell me that until *The Harvester* taught them, they never had such an idea as that the *biggest thing* a man could possibly do was to be too clean and proud and fine to stoop to common, contaminating sin? Is it nothing that in forty-eight hours' time from college people of China, South Africa, and Arabia comes the word that the books are a blessing to them and a help in their work? In the past ten years tens of thousands of people have sent me word that directly through my books they have been led outdoors and to a higher conception of the beauties of nature. My mail brings an average of ten such letters a day from students and teachers. I honestly believe that my nature books and nature novels have sent as many people afield in the past twenty years as the work of the combined scientists of the world during that period. That is a big statement; but I believe enough people will rise up and bear witness to prove it beyond controversy.

"This is what my father would have called 'getting results.' As for the fortune I might have made and have not, I never would think of it had not a globe-trotting woman who follows a prescribed formula in writing books seen fit to attack me in a recent article in the *New York Sun* and to make some very sarcastic and wholly



untrue statements concerning me. She begins by wiping me off the list of women writers of the country at 'one fell swoop' with the amazing statement that as a writer I am 'frankly commercial.' What I have previously written is sufficient answer to this charge, and my books stand proof of it. To this I would like to add that I have lost for myself and for my publishing house thousands of dollars through refusing to have my books dramatised because I would not submit to having changed variants of them put before the public. It is true that I have said, possibly in print, that I never would stop field work long enough to write a novel were I not forced to by the necessity of earning money with which to live and pay the excessive expenses of nature work.

"When I exhausted the possibilities of the Limberlost, South, I had to seek new worlds to conquer. This change in territory involved the purchase of one hundred and twenty acres of forest and orchard land on a lake shore in marshy country. It meant the building of a permanent, all-the-year-around residence which provided the comforts of life for my family and a workshop, consisting of a library, photographic dark room, and a print-out room for me. Now I could live in a home I could provide from the result of nature work; but when my nature territory was wiped out, I never could have moved my home and working grounds had it not been for the income from the novels, which I am now and always have in great part spent on doing nature work. But this does not mean that when I write a novel I put into it less than the level best there is in me, or that I forget the principles of honour and write a book to sell, no matter at what cost to my ideals or with no thought of its effect upon the people for whom I write.

"I heartily agree with Horace Greeley when he wrote Thoreau:

In my poor judgment, if anything is calculated to make a scoundrel out of an honest man, writing to sell is that particular thing.

Any one in the least acquainted with me personally, or with my methods of living and working, knows how repugnant the thought of working solely for money would be.

"One of our literary women writes:

A vast number of American women are sentimental and practically uneducated. There is also a growing number that are sentimental and fairly well educated. These demand a novel far in advance of anything that Gene Stratton-Porter or Harold Bell Wright can give them.

"Incidentally, I like my company. Mr. Wright was a minister until he learned that it was futile to talk to an audience of hundreds when he could reach hundreds of thousands with his pen. So he did what any sane man would have done: devoted his life to the 'greatest good to the greatest number.' He writes a clean, honest, invigorating book I greatly enjoy reading, and so do an overwhelming majority of other people who might be engaged, if they chose, with a book detailing such lives as are minutely described in many of our popular novels.

"I do not care how much attractive description any book contains, how many 'glimpses of life' in any land; if the facts of life as described in the book are not true, the book is a failure. No human being can fill a book with 'glimpses' of foreign lands, accompanied by 'descriptions of their scenery and society' as casually seen in travel, and then 'make men and women behave as if they were a part of it.' When men and women behave

as if they are a part of anything, they are rooted and grounded until they really *are* a part of it, and no one passing in travel and stopping even for months can probe depth of character and describe right impulses, for 'the land in which you live and the procession of the year' are the factors of character formation. These two things spell association and environment, which makes any man in any land. Before any one can write a true and faithful book of any people, he must go and live and home and die with them.

"I am perfectly willing for any one, I care not how cultured, to skip my nature books and select at random any one of the novels and compare it with any novel, and then say honestly if there is not as much 'evidence of intellectual pursuit' in my book as is to be found in any other. I will cheerfully grant that the things my intellect pursues may differ widely; but study of any sort is 'intellectual pursuit,' and if I put so much of my kind of pursuit into a book that it becomes 'oppressive,' my schedule of sales indicates that people are enduring the oppression with remarkable fortitude, paying for the privilege even.

"On such a basis as is outlined above, I have written twenty books. Please God I live so long, I shall write twenty more. Very probably every one of them will be located wherever I am living. Each one will be filled with all the fields and woods legitimately falling to its location, and peopled with men and women like my father and mother and the manliest and best and bravest of my men friends, and the motherliest and purest of the women, and the books will be absolutely clean and true to the highest of life as are all I ever have written, and unless

my barrel fails me, they will be seasoned with plenty of molasses.

"Surely I am not to 'blame' if the people who waded through the fields and woods of my books have proved my publishers wrong in the beginning when they said my stuff never would sell enough to pay for publishing it. It is through no effort of mine that I am listed among best sellers. My formula for a book was damned by three of our foremost publishers in the beginning, *and I never have changed it a particle*. Nothing could have surprised me more than to have seen *Freckles*, at seven years of age, creeping into the lists of best-selling books. No poor little lost sheep ever seemed to me farther from home than *A Girl of the Limberlost* among half a dozen novels of fiction alone, and the same was true of *The Harvester* and *Laddie*.

"What my work proves for me that I have done was to lay out a straight course in the beginning, starting with a nature book and alternating with nature novels, and to follow it with unswerving fidelity, keeping to the same location and to people I know and to ideals I cherish. When critics call me 'frankly commercial,' it only proves that they have read none of my books, least of all the nature ones, and know nothing whatever of the history of the work I have done.

"I am informed by my publisher that more copies of my books have been sold in England than of any other American author: four hundred thousand copies were sold last year in England, one publisher selling one hundred thousand copies of *Freckles*, and that book is now twenty years old. Thousands have been sold in Australia, and from reports on foreign translations, they

are selling in Denmark, Sweden, Spain, Germany, Arabia, Norway, Holland, and Czecho-Slovakia."

People may get their feet wet, and their clothes soiled, wading through the swamps with Mother, but, thank God, their heads are up, their eyes meet yours squarely, and their souls are unafraid.



## Chapter XXVIII

### APPRECIATIONS FROM READERS

THE following are a few from among the thousands of letters which came to Mother. I have thought them interesting because of the wide divergence between their writers who are drawn together in a common appreciation of and love for the beautiful work Mother succeeded in doing. She possessed a gift which touched the common chord in all human hearts and called forth such response as these letters contain. The first is from Mr. Perriton Maxwell, the editor who accepted her first story, "*Laddie, the Princess, and the Pie.*"

Bayside, Long Island, N. Y.,

September 12, 1921.

MY DEAR MRS. STRATTON-PORTER:

I have waited until I could finish reading *Her Father's Daughter* before acknowledging your wonderfully kind and thoughtful letter and the copy of your latest novel. I do not know that my opinion is of much value in an estimate of your new book. I do know, however, that in it you show a greater gift for character delineation and analysis and an increased power of picturing in words not only the large natural background of your story, but the workings of the souls of an interesting group of flesh-and-blood people. I think your Linda Strong is your finest portrait to date; she is genuine, vivid, real. Your change of environment has apparently opened up a new

world for you, a world different from your beloved Limberlost, but because of its fresher appeal, a more inviting and therefore a more interesting canvas upon which you have spread your latest and best picture.

I have been grinding away at the editorial desk for the past four years, but will give myself a respite after October first. From then on I hope to do some worthwhile writing. I have things to say which have been locked up in my head for a long time. One of these things is the story of twenty years of editorial contacts with great writers and artists.

Meanwhile, my novel *A Third of Life* is being issued—this week. I will send you a copy, and, of course, I will greatly appreciate your estimate of its worth.

With the deepest gratitude for your remembrance and the wish that continuing good health be added to your fame and prosperity, believe me, always, dear lady,

Sincerely yours,

PERRITON MAXWELL.

From the beloved Riley, in the last years of his life, came this letter:

Indianapolis,

October 19th, 1915.

DEAR MRS. PORTER:

I am particularly glad that you set forth the creed of wholesomeness and cheer, which was the message of the dear masters, Longfellow and Dickens. No doubt they are as loved by you as they are by me, for so I judge from the hale and optimistic and glad note of your very lovable books.

Appreciatively and loyally yours,

JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY.

And from her contemporary, Harold Bell Wright:

Tecolote Rancho,

Holtville, Imperial Valley, California,

April 1, 1914.

DEAR MADAM:

My boys tell me that they have been writing you, expressing their appreciation of *Laddie*. In this, as in many things, they have "beaten me to it." Many times I have promised myself the pleasure which they have thus realised. When I finished *The Harvester* I thought to tell you of my gratitude—and so with *Freckles*, *A Girl of the Limberlost* and *Laddie*. But each time I only succeeded in laying another section of that good intention pavement which, it is said, makes easy going on the road that leads to—well—anyway—I am glad the "kiddies" have accomplished that which their "Daddy" so long neglected.

Believe me, I do thank you for your books; not only for myself, personally, but for my boys, for my household, and friends, and for our race that, in this day, so much needs the sort of stories you are writing.

With kindest regards and many wishes for your continued and ever-increasing success and popularity, I am,

Sincerely yours,

HAROLD BELL WRIGHT.

The following is a characteristic letter from her old friend and critic, William Sloan Kennedy:

Lovell Centre, Maine,

July 24, 1916.

MY DEAR MRS. STRATTON-PORTER:

Mrs. Kennedy joins me here at the sylvan cottage to-day. I have been up here for ten days getting ready

for her, and getting work done on the various outbuildings and boathouses.

As I sweep my glance around over the world of people left behind, I can think of no one more than you for whom I feel a soul affinity, a literary affinity, and moral one. Hence this letter.

I did not go to see John Burroughs. I told Mrs. Barrus, "I do not know that I ever shall come." Now, Mrs. Barrus is a splendid good woman, but when I had planned to have a tête-à-tête with him, a little "he-festival" in his "Slabsides" camp away from all womankind for once, she would have been in the wrong place. He is a good thinker and observer and charmingly tells things, but he is an old fool not to read you, and so is every one who refuses to! Well, he's a dear old John. After all, I love him and would like to see him every week or month, for he's so rational usually, and knows how to weigh evidence candidly.

What I enjoy up here on this dismal, beautiful lake is that even more than at our hill-top seclusion at Belmont, I am away from people . . . Here, *nella foresta*, no one imposes building restrictions or tells you when to wear your straw hat. You are face to face with the raw material of the universe out of which you've been elaborated (man and bird are still "pawing to be free") and you breathe a deep sigh of relief and rub shoulders delightedly with the old god Pan, unadulterated and genuine.

I brought two or three manuscripts up for rainy days, and a little work of that kind goes well. Mrs. Kennedy had a terrible siege of six weeks in bed with a carbuncle due to a fall on her knee. I was nurse and the good doctor who came daily for six weeks took in the money!

Biles is mysterious critters. Old Job —— but I spare thee.

Good luck to Mrs. Gene S-P this summer !

Yours to command,

WM. SLOAN KENNEDY.

From a San Antonio business man whom Mother did not know came the following letter of appreciation:

DEAR MRS. PORTER:

No one could write *Laddie*, *Freckles* or *A Girl of the Limberlost* without living as "Little Sister" lived—the sweetest little character that I have ever met in fiction and most truly representative of the usual big family life.

Somehow I would rather think of you as "Little Sister" than as Mrs. Stratton-Porter. You are certainly a real friend. This last year I missed my summer vacation on account of illness in the family, but fell in with your books and read them all in a few weeks and had one of the best vacations I ever enjoyed.

Your writing is so different from that of the present day, on so much higher moral plane, so much truer to human character and experience, and so human in every way. There is not only a high ideal held out to your readers which is beneficial to the reading public, but your books are especially different in presenting strong characters who succeed by right living and the right kind of effort. You make it appear always and strongly that to live right is not only a good policy, but leads to the most successful life, and that good, honest effort in the true human spirit always brings satisfactory results. Such lessons cannot but be of great service to the public. There is not a question but you are the greatest woman writer since George Eliot, and excel her in many respects.



In closing up the year I always want to say something or do something to make some one feel happy, and it is in this spirit that I write you, but more especially to thank you for the great pleasure that you have given me personally. May you live long to give to the public such good books as you have written, and may every blessing attend you. I love you better than them all and shall follow your writings with great interest.

With personal good wishes, I am,

Very truly yours,

J. S. LANFORD.

*December 31, 1914.*

Letters filled with personal questions were received almost daily, such as the following:

DEAR MADAME:

Have just read *Michael O'Halloran*, and, as with all your books, "the last is always the best." I offer you my felicitations. I am also taking the liberty of asking you a few questions:

Was there really ever such a boy as Mickey?

What religion do you profess?

You cannot possibly be a suffragette, can you?

What one of your books do you consider your "masterpiece" up to date?

Hoping to have a reply at your earliest convenience,

I am, a reader,

E. J. STOREY.

And there is the following from a man who evidently felt the need of telling some one all about himself, his troubles, and his shortcomings, and chose Mother for his audience.

DEAR MRS. PORTER, "LITTLE SISTER" AND FRIEND OF  
THE WEARY:

Usually I think it is cranks and such who are drawn into comment by articles. I hope I am not of these. Your article of wisdom in *McCall's* has led me to wish that there were more people in this world of the wise variety. It is seldom that woman's voice speaks in conservation; usually it is heard in "freedom's urge," etc.

I was a husband and father for fourteen years, with a normal husband and father's love. My wife and I have been separated now about two years. For some four or five years prior to our separation, my wife had "freedom's urge" descending on her in various ways, seeking expression. This urge finally found its outlet in "woman's work." Kiddies did not matter, nor home; the prime thing was the urge. We clashed over this, and finally sickness came to me and reverses. I was told by my wife that she could care for herself, and I should do likewise.

A couple of years of wrestling with self to forget took me through the customary deserts and mountains and strange cities that we read about, and so, of course, I finally forgot, as we all do or die. But, during those long years of married life I had been painfully moral and conventional. My wife had pulled long and hard and strong for progress and modernity. Of course, I was old-fashioned and out of date and not smart. Wisdom is a bore to most women.

Well, to-day I have lost my cherished morality, a fitting penalty for the prude. The whirligig world has got me at last, after all those years of defying her from "on high." And, alas! I have also lost my terrible and strenuous love and infatuation for my wife, a thing which

I thought I never could lose. And I have got that awful thing my wife used to talk so much about, and I hated so thoroughly—"freedom." I never wanted it, but I have got the thing now, and I find it—good! And the kiddies are scattered about the broad land—Bohemian, Russian, modern and desirable(?). The landlords are not the only ones who don't want kiddies any more. And my heart is not torn asunder about them any more as it used to be when I urged my wife to stay at home and take care of them with tears in my eyes.

I understand my wife wants me to come home. And I cannot make up my mind whether I want to go back or not. I left with great reluctance. If I return it will be in the same manner. Of course, I shall end up in doing the "right thing." But I can't take that old, staid, stay-at-home, safe old daddy back to save me, if I do go.

Of course, if it were just a case of one person or one family in the world, it would not matter much. But I travel far and wide, and being a salesman who sells women goods in their homes, I learn much of the inside of homes in general. And I meet such hosts of men, remnants like myself, cluttering up life's bargain counter, that, reading an article like yours causes me to think that things are certainly getting appalling, seeing life in the "raw" as I do.

My wife was always rather forward and unconventional, and I used to reprove her for things and acts that, while they were not really disreputable, yet they were not exactly becoming in a mother, so I told her. Of course, she did not take kindly to being reproved for automobile rides with "stranger" men, salesmen on business bent, and learning to dance without my knowledge or consent, and, so I thought, undue familiarity and unnecessary atten-

tions from and with fellow salesmen and the like where we were working together. I told her it was unbecoming in an older woman and one married and with children to be flippant and jocular and to josh about flappers with modern, young, gay Lothario salesmen. Very funny it sounds now; but I meant it then! All of which you could put down under the head as silly and not necessarily harmful. But, oh, boy! It hurt. Because we never, never know.

And now I am nearing success at last in my work. I want a home because I know every old man needs one. I really do not want one, any more. But, regardless of illusions, I think I should have one. So, of course, I want a wife for that home. Looking back, I don't know whether I want the same one or not. I really don't. Of course, I want to do my duty. I understand my wife wants me back. Some of the illusions of woman's work have worn off. It is not all easy sailing, it seems.

So, dear Mother of the World, God bless you and your kind who never grow weary nor discouraged, nor weaken, like we poor men who fall under the battering ram of life. Keep up your good work. You are reaching rusty old hearts with their creaking hinges. The world is up against it. I have seen it high and low. You are right and deserve credit for having the courage to say so in time, when such comment is not popular. The "devil is to pay." As you say, we are due for a fall and a grand smash, and everybody knows it, but nobody cares. Our morality is bankrupt, and we all ought to be jolly well ashamed of ourselves, but we aren't. We are brazen. We should be sincere and repentant. But we have lost our sincerity. All we want to do is to "stoke up the fires" for the animal living within us and to kill our souls.

I am no fanatic. I used to be an idealist. Huh! Funny! I am just a plain, practical man who finds himself beginning to grow old, and who, through force of circumstances, finds himself making the most of what he has. I have not the time nor ability nor morality (any more) to fool around with world conditions and try to help the other fellow. The younger men set a hard pace for me to keep up, and I have to gallop to do so and spurt to get ahead.

There is nothing on earth that I would like to have better than a decent, respectable home and my kiddies back in it. But I am cynical. (A sign of age.) But I still have courage, and I am going to try again. My experience does not count. It is the little kiddies where the heart aches, and thinking of them, as you say. Surely, they were made of different clay, those forbears of ours who had character and sense. Invent a motto or creed, or saying or something. All such propaganda is foolish, but we are a foolish people, as witness P. T. Barnum's well-known saying and Wrigley's chewing-gum success. Try something like this:

Woman, get wise.  
Man, get help—

or something else a little bit more or less foolish. It won't do me and my kind any good, because we are already smitten. But it might help out the younger set. At any rate, my heart is with you and your kind, even if I have "gone to pot" with the devil and legion of his poor, weak fools.

Sincerely,  
U. R. RIGHT.



And here is a refreshing letter from an Australian schoolgirl:

56 McArthur Place,  
Carlton, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia,  
October 22, 1916.

DEAR MRS. PORTER:

I expect that you get a great many letters from those who love your books. I wonder if you will be surprised to get one from such a long way as Australia. I have been wanting to write to you for some time, but did not like to bother you. I think you must be a wonderful woman to write such beautiful books; they do one good to read them. They have helped me very much, your characters all seem like personal friends.

Recently we had a little gathering at the home of one of my chums. We had what we called a "Gene Stratton-Porter Night" and each one was expected to say which was her favourite character and why. I found it very hard to choose, but finally found that Elnora Comstock was one of my first favourites. She was a fine girl, true-hearted and brave and strong, and she *won out*—just what we all would like to do. Mickey proved to be the most popular, and we all decided that we hoped that some day we might hear more of Mickey and Lily Peaches.

I am enclosing a postcard showing our beautiful wattle in bloom. Hurst Bridge is a favourite picnic spot about twenty miles from Melbourne. In the beginning of September the wattle is at its best and we have what we call "Wattle Day." The blossom is sold in the streets of the city by hundreds of girls in aid of the children's

charities, and we always get a large sum of money, usually about three thousand pounds.

I hope you will not mind me sending you my little word of appreciation. I am to send love to you from each of my chums. With Christmas greetings and very best love,

Yours sincerely,  
NANCY DAVOREN.

The following is a letter from the woman in South Africa who sent Mother the exquisite white feathers which she treasured so highly.

Vredelust, Stellenbosch, South Africa,  
February 7, 1910.

DEAR MRS. STRATTON-PORTER:

You thank me? Why, the debt is on my side, entirely. That you wrote, and what you wrote, and writing as you did write, made me feel very much honoured. There was a fascination about the very address. Imagine! "Limberlost Cabin." It makes one see far away into the leafy solitudes you describe, and I do appreciate the portion of your overfull time you gave me. Do not let me trespass too much.

I do hope the new books are going to be great successes. They cannot fail from the literary point of view. So I will, as we have it in our Taal, "hold my thumb" that the monetary part may be all right. Why not circulate in England, too? They haven't anything like you there. And out here your books are not known at all. I saw *Freckles* by chance. A friend came upon it in their village library, and, generous soul she is, wanted me to share the pleasure it gave her. So she sneaked it out and posted it to me, and as many of us as could

manage to do so enjoyed it during the few days we could keep it. Then it was that your name seemed familiar, and I looked up some old *Journals*<sup>1</sup> and found those articles on "What I Have Done with Birds," and found, let me confess, to my surprise, that I liked them *even better* than I had *Freckles*, though for sweetness that goes very far.

Sorry, but I have no more lion stories just now. I've not met any Rhodesia friends lately and the Nyassaland ones do not know lions as well as tigers. But an you'd care to have them, later on I can send you some lion claws. They make up into very handsome ornaments, clasps and brooches. I wrote to a cousin and commandeered some; he said he would certainly get me some. In the meantime, I am sending you a tiger claw hailing from the shores of Lake Nyassa. About half of it, when polished and set in gold, makes a very pretty pendant.

Thus the big black claw: A boy sat talking to me, fiddling with it, a claw of what they call in the Karrao a "lammervanger." Don't try to pronounce it; say "lamb catcher." It is a species of vulture, the size of a young turkey; nests in a tree using sticks for its rude nest; very powerful. And here another boy entered, rather, a man down from Lake Nyassa on furlough, and I questioned him about the birds there. I wish you could have done it, for I discovered he had been very observant. He told of paroquets and parrots, sparrows brown like the English variety, not black and white like ours. Farther up the lake he said there were marabou and the crested crane. You'd better come and see for yourself. Go up via Delegna round past the lower shores of the lakes, then on till you get to the Zambesi and the Falls and

<sup>1</sup> Copies of the *Ladies' Home Journal*.

down through Rhodesia. That's the "grand tour" I am living in hopes of—some day. And I can give you a string of introductions to a number of friends—sporting missionaries, all of them. One wrote he had been doing a deal of pioneer work. Going after a number of trekkers, he had been obliged to use his athletic trophies cups for his Communion service vessels!

In the meantime, I am sending you a few more feathers. Now don't say "No." If you have no use for them, then surely you have a kindred spirit who has. Besides, suppose I wore them. I'd have to explain all along the line that they were not undersized ostrich feathers. Whereas, if you have them, it is like telling your best joke to one with a keen sense of humour and one without any! Only, keep the best for yourself.

Yours with regards and all good wishes,

A. KATIE NEETHLING.

## Chapter XXIX

### LETTERS TO HER READERS

THE following are selected at random from among the innumerable letters that Mother wrote daily in answer to all sorts of inquiries and pleas for guidance. Her readers, out of their love and a sincere belief in her wisdom, looked to her for inspiration and help in meeting the personal problems of everyday life, and Mother always answered their letters, after taking thought on the problems presented her, with kindness and sympathy and a never-failing understanding.

Mrs. A—— H——,  
Fargo, North Dakota.

MY DEAR MADAM:

I have read your letter with a great deal of interest and much sympathy. I notice that it is correctly spelled, properly punctuated, and phrased above the ordinary expression of the day. If you feel the urge to write, why not choose the most attractive subject you can think of upon which you are thoroughly informed, and try your hand? You might begin with some newspapers near you, or some of the smaller magazines, until you get the hang of the thing. You would not think of trying to make a watch without having had some experience in the craft, and you should not think of trying to attempt the profession of authorship without preparation; but if you really have something to say to the world that you can



phrase in crisp, clear terms, something to which you can give a new angle or a fresh stroke, you might possibly make an opening which would develop to your great joy.

There is not a thing connected with farming concerning which you can inform me. I was born on a farm and lived there until time to begin my schooling. I have had my part in everything that ever happened on a farm, from making candles and pressing cracklings to drying apples and dropping corn. I understand exactly what your trouble is. Under very similar conditions to those you describe I was born near enough the close of the Civil War to have seen my people go through the hard times which ensued, and I saw my mother do it with pink on her cheeks and her eyes a-shine, her head held high, and getting a deal of enjoyment out of each day that she canned and sewed and scoured because she believed in God and loved her neighbours, and she was always giving of herself in every way she could think of to try to bring a bit of joy into the lives of others, as well as to keep her own family continuously effervescing. I believe the first thing for you to do is to forget that you are discouraged and to join with your neighbours and try to instil some church life, some club life, some social interests into your life, so that things may not be so grey and monotonous, and I am seriously in earnest when I say that in your case I should begin with some simple little thing with which I was thoroughly conversant and write what was in my heart and mind about it and try it on some of the magazines especially interested in the work of women. You might be able to write an extremely interesting article based on the underlying truths that hurt concerning the present conditions of farm life. At

any rate, in your case I surely should try to bring out the level best I could produce myself, and I would try to influence my whole family to do the same. And then I would try loving God and loving the neighbours and putting my own personality on my particular landscape just as big as I could make it loom.

With all good wishes,

Very truly your friend,

GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

Master D—— T——,  
Marysville, Ohio.

DEAR LAD:

I am sorry you are having a lonely time and are homesick, but stick it right out, because going to school is your best chance to learn to spell and to write a properly worded, grammatical letter, to get your mathematics and geography and the things you need to fit you for a life in some useful industry.

I think all of us have our hard, lonely times during school days; but I believe that if you hold your head up and do your work well, you will certainly find some nice girl among the other pupils in the High School who will be glad to walk with you and to talk with you: but you will have to be cheerful, not too sober and pessimistic. You will have to think of something to talk to her about that will interest her as well as you. Whatever you do, stick to your studies and make good grades. Do the thing that is right, and you are bound to come out right in the end. I will think about you often and say a little special prayer that you will be able to win the regards of your schoolmates and soon be past the lonely stage.

You must remember the old adage: "In order to have friends, a man must show himself friendly."

With all good wishes, I am, sincerely your friend,  
GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

Miss W—— C——,  
New Era, Michigan.

MY DEAR GIRL:

I have very great sympathy for the letter you have written me because, in a way, it closely describes the kind of a girlhood I had so far as the religious question is concerned. I have read your letter very carefully. You tell me what you think you ought to do, and you ask my advice and my help; and with the very best intentions in the world, I will tell you what I think.

I do not believe that any young girl of twenty years of age, sufficiently cultured to be away from home teaching school, is going to be happy if she shuts herself from her kind and makes the living of the Christian life a thing so hard and barren that she has no company and no pleasures. If you will take your Bible and read it carefully from cover to cover, you will find that there was a good deal of dancing and feasting and singing and visiting combined with the life of the day. I will admit that there was more of it in that climate than is possible in the one in which you live. There cannot possibly be any one who believes in stricter morality and straighter truth, in finer loyalty to friends than I do; but I do not think Jesus Christ ever meant or intended that any young girl should live the restricted and unhappy life that you live. Certainly I should go on with my church work. Certainly I should go on with my prayers. Certainly, also, I should go to the dances that are given by young people of my

age. It is not necessary for you to dance in a dreadful way. It is not necessary for you to lower one mental or moral standard; but it is necessary for you to have some society, for you to learn to love and appreciate your associates, if you are going to have a balanced and a happy life.

People who make fun of praying and of reading the Bible are ignorant, and it need make no difference to you what they either think or say. Just keep your own conscience clean and put your trust in God and do your level best to do unto others as you would be done by, and you will be a very fine little Christian and a much happier one than you are at the present minute. I can see no harm in the world in small dances given in homes, in clubhouses, and in schools; and I can see none in games that are not played for financial returns; and I can see none in picnics and parties and motoring where things are done decently and in order. You will always find everywhere a few people who are going to extremes, who are being silly and vulgar; but it is not necessary that you should do that.

It is quite true that I believe in prayer; but I also believe in finding a job you love and holding up your head and getting a lot of joy out of every hour of every day of your life. Of course, be the very best Christian you can; but at the same time go to work and see how much harmless fun you can get out of being a Christian, and pretty soon you will be surprised at how much better and brighter life will seem to you.

If you are determined in your heart to become a missionary, write to the Bible School at Fort Wayne, Indiana. It is possible for you to find a place in a good home there where you can work of nights and mornings for

your board and attend the school where they train girls for missionaries at very slight, if any, expense to them. I believe the place to be mostly maintained by the Methodist Church.

Personally, I am not much on interfering with the affairs of the peoples of other nations. When one reaches them, one generally finds that they are living a life evolved by the locations in which they live, that they are happy in their religion and quite capable of taking care of themselves. I would personally rather see every healthy, bright young girl in the United States marry a first-class young man, establish the right kind of a home, and bring some youngsters of good American blood and breeding into the country to help offset the inpouring from every nation of Europe and practically every nation of the globe. Think it over. I actually believe that you are praying too much; you are brooding and making yourself unhappy, and that is not what Jesus Christ intended should happen to any nice young girl. My best advice is that you take your religion less seriously and cotton up to the first nice young man you meet and find yourself a beau, and see how much sweet and innocent fun you can extract from life. That is what I try to do every day I live.

Very truly your friend,  
GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

Mrs. H. J——,  
Portland, Maine.

MY DEAR MADAM:

I have a strong suspicion that you feel very much about the grey hairs that are beginning to creep in among the soft brown ones as I feel myself, but I notice they keep



coming right straight along, and I have discovered a few lately among a pair of heavy brows which decorate my face.

I have had not the slightest experience with any artificial thing that can be done to keep hair brown when nature says it is time for it to go grey. If I were you, I should not give it a thought. I would just keep it washed and prettily dressed and go straight ahead with a youthful, laughing face; but I would not make myself artificial, because I have seen it tried frequently. It always stiffens and roughens the hair and makes a lie out of it when it might as well tell the truth. Forget it, and keep your face and heart young with love and laughter. Never mind what colour your hair is so long as it is clean.

Very truly yours,

GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

F—— H. L——,  
Memphis, Tennessee.

MY DEAR MR. L——:

Without having time for matured deliberation, I would say offhand that the first thing I would recommend to any student body is to make a strenuous effort to preserve the integrity of the English language in its highest forms and most beautiful usage. Everywhere I go I find people using such carelessly constructed sentences, dropping the endings of words, running several words together, and speaking such a jargon of slang that it is shocking. To speak grammatically, clearly, and distinctly, giving each word its proper pronunciation, is a high achievement for any young man or woman to attain. I believe that it is up to all the boys and girls in every school and college of the country not only to do every-

thing in their power to improve the brand of English which each and every one is writing and speaking, but to use whatever influence they may have in their homes, in their neighbourhoods, and among their friends. If youngsters would make a practice of calling attention to any improper language in daily use, it would be a great help; and if the public in general would arise and demand that the books that are being published for them should be written in the highest form of English possible, it would be a great help. I have always firmly believed that the exquisite English employed by the late Joseph Conrad was due to the fact that when this author was nineteen years of age he did not know one word of English, and when he did study English, what he learned was not from association but from books, and as he was studying the best books that the English language had to offer, bordering on maturity, he learned the English language from books and not from people.

The second thing I would say is not to be afraid to be sufficiently old-fashioned to cling to the books, the poetry, the pictures, the music which represent the classic work that has been done in the past. Every accomplishment of enduring beauty in any form of art should be preserved and used as a model for future work.

The next thing I think of is astronomy. Whenever I come in contact with a real astronomer and begin to learn more of the vastness of the universe, of systems upon systems like our own stretching away into space, the more I want to know about it, and I do not believe there is any one study that can be taken up that will broaden the imagination, that will be the source from which will spring more deep thinking and sincere research than the study of astronomy.

And lastly, I believe it essential to any well-rounded man or woman to be thoroughly acquainted with the Bible, to accept reverently the Ten Commandments, and to do whatever is possible on the journey through life to emulate the works of Jesus Christ. There is no better authenticated figure in history, and no other one man who taught such a sane, reasonable, and workable form of spiritual uplift. All this filling of the Bible with mysteries and hair-splitting arguments seems foolishness to me, and I have not much patience with it. I have always found the word of God plain and clear and sufficiently easy to understand by those who are interested in understanding.

Very truly yours,  
GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

Miss E—— M—— B——,  
Leitchfield, Kentucky.

MY DEAR GIRL:

It has seemed to me in the past that I have had almost every kind of a letter that could be written during the very close to thirty years that I have been before the public as an author; but the appeal in your letter is of a new kind. Certainly my heart aches for you, and I am sorry to the depths of my soul for the unpleasant things that happened in your child life; but now that you are in school and eighteen years of age, and if the boy you care for is fond of you, cannot you put those things behind you and together with him figure out a different and a better way?

I think the thing for you to work for is to try to forget yourself and to forget the unpleasant things in life that warped and troubled you. Cannot you become inter-

ested in making a collection of something, or reading something, or embroidering, or doing something to occupy your hands and your brain to the exclusion of dwelling on the unpleasant things of the past? Watch those around you and see what you can do for other people that will help them to get more out of life. Watch your boy friend. See what he is most interested in, and then see if you cannot interest yourself in the same things. If he likes to fish or hunt, go fishing or hunting with him. If he likes to read, try to find helpful and uplifting books to lend to him and to read to him. Put your wits to work. It is a case where I can do nothing for you. As my father used to say to me when I went to him for help as a child, "It is a case where you have got to lift yourself by your own bootstraps"; but I am quite sure that a girl who writes such a nice letter as you have written me, and especially a Kentucky girl, can do this very thing.

With love to you and all good wishes, I am,

Very truly your friend,

GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

M—— S——,

Ashland, Georgia.

MY DEAR GIRL:

I have read your letter with deep and sincere interest. If you have not had much opportunity for education, you certainly have made the best of what you had, for the letter you have written me is beautifully expressed, absolutely correct as to spelling, punctuation, and capitalisation, and far superior to the average of the daily correspondence that comes to my desk.

I am very sorry that I cannot do what you ask, be-

cause I never have been south of a few miles to the south of Cincinnati. I do not know your country, your people, your atmosphere, or your occupations. I would have to come to the South to live until I got at the very root of things before I could write. The reason the things I have written heretofore have had some small success is because I have always had enough hard horse sense to keep to the land in which I was born and to people with whose atmosphere, geographical and mental, I am thoroughly acquainted. When I moved to California I studied the people and the country for three or four years before I undertook to write concerning them.

If you have any story-telling ability, why not work out a plot and write the story that you want written yourself? You might not be able to succeed with a first endeavour, but I believe, as fluent as you are in expression, if you have any dramatic sense and if you have the fineness in the heart that makes you so covet giving a song to the world, why might you not give a story? In your place I should try.

Very sincerely yours,  
GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

Mr. V—— K——,  
Biloxi, Mississippi.

DEAR FRIEND:

Under separate cover I am sending you my latest effort at a book, and I thought that along with it you might like to have a copy of my latest portrait. I will send the one my children like the best. You can stand it somewhere around your living room and I will guarantee that every morning it will say: "Good morning, Mr. K——! Have you used a bird song and have you smelled



a flower?" And every night it will say: "Good-night, Mr. K——! I hope you had a good time with the birds and flowers to-day!"

I am going to tell you the lines that I have fashioned for over the fireplace of a new workshop that I am building out in the Santa Monica hills on a tiny baby mountain with a little cañon of its own running down each side, six miles from the ocean, which is close enough to see the waves breaking white at the feet of the Palisades and, on clear days, Catalina Island, where I am going to have a summer workshop.

Mother Mary, seek the King,  
Ask of Him a wondrous thing;  
Send to this, my working place,  
A wealth of wings and flower grace.

This little new book that I am sending you I want you to begin in the middle and read the "Afterword" first, so that you will have a clear understanding of what I am trying to put across in the poem.

Very truly your friend,  
GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

Miss H—— A——,  
Los Angeles, California.

MY DEAR GIRL:

Thank you very much for the letter you have just written me. I greatly appreciate it. Certainly I try with all my might to keep my life straight in the sight of my Creator and to do as I would be done by in my dealings with my neighbours. I have no doubt whatever but I make many mistakes. That is why Jesus Christ was sent into the world—to help us when we do make mistakes—and I am depending on Him for help when I reach places in which I am not able to help myself.

In answering the question you have asked me, allow me to make this explanation: Previous to the time that I moved to Los Angeles, I lived not only in the country but in the woods, where church relations were impossible to me since there were no churches within reach, and during the years of my childhood, and all field work previous to coming to Los Angeles, I formed the habit of establishing and depending upon my own personal relations with my Creator. I am not a member of any church, not because I do not believe in creeds and churches for the great majority of people, but because in my personal case I have the feeling that they are not necessary. I prefer to continue in the relationship I feel is established between me and my Creator through a lifetime of nature study.

If possible, I would advocate holding services out-of-doors in summer, giving as my reason that God so manifests Himself in the trees, flowers, and grass that to be among His creations puts one in a devotional frame of mind, gives better air to breathe, and puts worship on a natural basis, as it was in the beginning, when Christ taught the people beside the sea and in the open. Then I would advocate the teaching of all nature work in the churches, as the revelations of God in nature are more clearly manifest than in any other place or way. Young people could see God as they never saw Him before in studying the relation of the bees and butterflies and moths to plant life, which they really propagate by carrying pollen back and forth, thus making plants fertile; flower colour is to attract insects so that they will perform this work. Then, I would advocate teaching the geography of the Bible and the natural history and the characteristics and habits of the people as a foundation upon which to build the spiritual side.

Then I would take a good stiff fling at the beautiful and luxurious buildings put up for clubs and lodges, while the churches are damp, dark, and musty, the preachers half fed and clothed, and the buildings and services so unattractive that the young dread to go. If God is God and heaven is heaven and men really do believe what they profess, then a church should be the biggest, lightest, most beautiful, cool, comfortable, and best-furnished place in a community, the minister should be the wisest, best-paid man, the music should be the finest, and every elevating and ennobling thing should be taught there, including housekeeping, gardening, music, civic improvement, everything relating to the well-being of men and women. Sunday should be a day eagerly waited for, and church services the best entertainment the town affords. Amen!

Very truly yours,

GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

Mr. William Sloan Kennedy,  
Boston, Massachusetts.

MY DEAR FRIEND:

I have read your book with the very greatest interest, and I am now engaged in lending it to my nature-loving friends. I am too glad for words that it has been published. My only regret about the whole matter is that the dear Lady who shared with you your days of disappointment over it might not be with you to see your work so beautifully reproduced and given its opportunity.

I greatly enjoyed your letter yesterday concerning *A Daughter of the Land*. I am going to paste it in the front cover of the book which is my first copy of that

edition off the presses of the publishing house. And it is not true that postal cards receive no attention in the mails: all three of yours came through.

I was amused at what you wrote about my coming to New England—that being carried in a flower-decked carriage stuff. My gracious, Man! if I thought anybody was going to haul me through the streets of a city or along a highway in a flower-decked carriage, I would go out and jump in the Pacific to escape the ordeal! You come on to California and I'll take you in an automobile through flower-decked streets until you actually get tired looking at flowers. The roses at this minute are more wonderful than I have known them to be during my six years of residence here. I never have seen anything like their perfection and beauty, and everything else is a riot of bloom as well. All the wild flowers are late this year, but my mountain is pretty well stocked with mariposa lilies, blue-eyed grass, cream cups, blue bonnets, Indian paint brush, and there is some owl's clover and yellow monkey flower just beginning to come. The bushes are hardly in flower as yet, but there is a world of birds. One old cock road-runner keeps crowing on the hillside to the west.

I hope you will have a lovely time in Europe, and while you are over I will do all in my power for the sale of your book.

As ever your friend,  
GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

DEAR MARY:

I want to send you my thanks for the happy birthday card. You suggest that we "keep mum and let 'em come" in reference to birthdays. My dear, I guess that is ex-

actly and precisely what we would do, only there is not a bit of use to keep mum about them because everybody knows that they are coming and when they are coming, and they insist on celebrating.

I thank you sincerely for your kind wishes for my health and happiness. If you could see me, you would realise that I am neither great nor famous: absolutely just the same person you knew back in Geneva in the days when I was working in secret and trying hard to get a start. Unless I am on exhibition at some big public function, I am a plain and simply dressed woman, working from breakfast in the morning until noon and frequently all afternoon, and sometimes in the evening, trying to carry off the big job of monthly magazine serials, my mail, some degree of housekeeping, personal supervision of the making of pictures, and, at the present minute, the building of a summer home in Catalina and an all-the-year-round workshop at Bel-Air, and if you do not believe that this is one woman's job, try it. I do take the time to put the best I have to give into each article as I write it. I think sometimes, when I look at the amount of work that I can perform in a day, that I had better keep my mouth shut on the question of health. It must be pretty good, or I could not spend a day from six in the morning to six at night carrying stone and working on a fountain!

With love and renewed thanks for your good wishes for my birthday, I am,

As ever your friend,  
GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

## *Chapter XXX*

DUSK ON A DECEMBER EVENING . . .

MOTHER finished the work she had planned to do on Catalina Island and returned to Los Angeles early in November. She had a happy Thanksgiving, with all the family together, and a wonderful trip through the northern part of the state. Mother was always very enthusiastic about Christmas, and she had already brought her lists and gone over them with me, and we had talked and planned, trying to think what would make each one on her lists happiest.

It was dusk on a December evening—dinner was over—the children were in bed—my husband and I were just starting to a radio show at the Ambassador Hotel, when the jangle of the telephone halted us. I answered. It was Miss Foster, Mother's secretary. Mother had started for an early evening visit with her aged brother—James had come running in with blood streaming from a cut across his forehead—there had been an accident just a block from the house—yes, Mother was hurt, but she didn't know how badly—James wanted Mr. Meehan at once. From then on I have only a few vivid impressions, but I will have them—always.

I remember Leo running to the garage, and myself standing motionless until Something drove me into action and told me I must go too. As Leo backed out of the garage, I jumped into the car—neither of us spoke as we



sped the few blocks to the corner of Fourth and Serrano. A street car stopped—the terrible wreck of the Lincoln limousine—a crowd of silent people—men with their hats off—a motionless shape huddled on the cushion of the car, covered with a blanket, the head bound—hands of kindly neighbours had done all possible for her comfort—but Mother was unconscious of it all—the great grey eyes were turned toward the heavens, gazing unseeingly at a few flickering stars.

Then the shrill scream of the ambulance siren—attendants pushing a pathway through the crowd—the wild ride to the emergency hospital—and I, crouched beside the stretcher, one hand on a pulse which was still holding steady and the other trying to hold the poor bound head, as it rolled with the lurching of the ambulance. I can remember having only one thought; I must keep within range of the closed eyes, so that if they opened they would see me—if Mother was conscious at all, she must see me there—she must know I would stay with her. Strange faces and curious eyes—a narrow hallway—the bare walls and glare of light in the operating room—the quiet step and grave faces of surgeon and nurse.

Some way I helped undress Mother—some way I helped lay her on the operating table—some way I watched the surgeon sew the gash in her head—some way I held her hand steady while he sewed a cut in one finger—and all the time I watched the closed eyes—surely there would be a knowing flash soon, for the pulse under my fingers still beat steadily. Then the arrival of our family physician—but cold hands clutched at my heart as I saw the surgeon lift one side of the sheet and motion our doctor to look—it was more, then, than her head!

The ambulance again—another ride with shrieking

siren—the quiet halls of another hospital—doctors—nurses—blankets—hypodermics—specialists—just faint impressions of these—my eyes still glued to those other eyes. Then the fingers I held began to grow colder and colder—the pulse grew gradually fainter—and so Mother slipped away from us, quietly and painlessly, thank God. Somehow I feel she knows I waited until the end for one last look from the keen grey eyes—but when I realised that her entire right side was crushed, and that she would have suffered intense pain had she regained consciousness, I was glad she slept away as she did. The terrific shock left its marks on me, but of that I do not think.

It was the same old story—a heavy car—street cars coming from each direction—a cold engine—a careless motorman—a grief-stricken chauffeur—and death. A beautiful and useful life snuffed out. Whose fault? He who doeth all things well says, “Judge not.”

So now our hearts are broken, but we must “carry on” bravely, as we know she would have us do. Although she is away, her indomitable will, her intense personality, and valiant spirit still dominate; and before I make decisions I find myself wondering if “Mother would like it” just as in the old days when I could run and ask her advice.

As I look back over the years, it appeals to me that the two most noticeable things about Mother were her eyes and her hands. She could maintain an immobile face under almost any circumstances, but if you knew her, and knew what to look for, you could read instantly approval or disapproval in her eyes. They were the one feature she could not mask. Her eyes were a clear, cool grey, with brown splotches; she often jokingly called them “cat eyes.” They had a piercing quality when she

gazed straight at you that penetrated to the very depths of your soul, and she read character almost infallibly. She had a keenness and a sweep of vision that was almost uncanny, and invaluable to her in her field work. She had a great sense of humour, and how those eyes twinkled and danced when she threw back her head and laughed until the tears ran down her cheeks!

I think the thing that struck me most forcibly as Mother lay sleeping was the absolute *quiet* of her hands. They were not beautiful hands in the sense of being well kept or perfectly manicured, but they were hands made beautiful, as some faces are made beautiful, by constant work and toil for others. Hers were such busy hands—they fluttered over everything, the velvet cheek or silky curls of a baby, the texture of rich tapestry or embroidery, the down on a butterfly wing, or the grain in a beautiful piece of wood. Things she liked and admired, she loved to touch, and she ran her fingers over them with a daintiness and a delicacy of touch that is given to few people. Signs reading “Do not touch” never meant a thing to Mother: she went where she wanted to go and touched anything she pleased. We used to marvel at how she did it, and was never bothered, but it must have been because she knew how to handle things, and never left them disturbed or with a mark of any kind. If she saw a fingerprint or little spot on any china or woodwork, either in her own home or some one else’s, she always took her handkerchief and carefully polished it.

Flower magic was in Mother’s fingertips, and everything she planted grew, she tucked in their toes so lovingly and with such infinite care and patience. She selected just the right spot for each plant, the proper amount of sun and shadow, the correct quality of soil,

and the right degree of moisture. In fact, she studied the wants and needs of flowers and birds with the same painstaking care that she studied the needs of humans, and helped them with the same degree of unselfish generosity. In the old days, when we did field work together, I have seen her stop the horse, clamber down from the buggy, and straighten a wild flower, broken by some careless foot, pat the dirt around it, prop it up with a stick or stone, straighten the petals and leaves carefully, and give it a drink from her thermos bottle.

So it is that the impression of her hands, hovering over everything, stays with me. One of my most prized possessions is the simple little string of beads, given to her by one of my kiddies years ago, that she fingered constantly as she dictated her books and articles. It is made up of smooth, brightly coloured shells, with bits of amethyst crystal between each one, and she liked to study them and watch the lights in them as they ran through her fingers, for Mother loved colour, and she used to remark that she "must be part Indian."

Mother had a distinctive way of speaking and writing. I think it was this manner of expression, the fact that her ideas and ideals were peculiarly her own, and that they were given to her readers in an inimitable, original way that has more or less baffled the critics. The critics, who sat smug and secure in their city offices and criticised, while Mother struggled through swamps and over ploughed fields, fought her way through thorns, quicksands, and poison snakes and insects, to give her readers the bit of natural history which they craved, in the common vernacular of the day, did not "get what Mother was driving at." They did not know what it was all about, and why her books had such remarkable success.

So, in their search for comments, they accused her of writing "sugary romance," of idealising her characters until they were unnatural, and of being ungrammatical. It never entered their self-sufficient heads that Mother's ambition might not be to write a masterpiece of literary perfection, faultless as to syntax and construction, but rather to offer her audience something new and inspiring and give it to them in a different and instructive manner. When you have your whole heart and soul in a subject, in your eagerness to explain it you might lose sight of the grammar in the more important aim of making interesting and understandable reading for the masses. Mother once wrote: "As to whether or not what I write is *literature*, I never bother my head." And she was quite correct; the sales her work had, the prices it commanded, and her host of friends and admirers all prove that she accomplished her purpose without perfection of literary style, and that her work was popular among all classes and kinds, from the college professor to the prisoner behind bars.

I would say to the critics that the popularity of her work lies in the fact that it is so absolutely human, because she tells people what they themselves think, but puts it in such a new and attractive way that they are surprised when they see it in print. The woman on the farm has thought these things; the misguided boy in prison wonders why he was never taught to meet life's complicated situations in simple ways; the instructor or professor wonders why he never thought of things in that simple, direct way before; and the wealthy woman, who perhaps is weary of a narrow, selfish existence, realises that she is not really living at all, and sighs unhappily as she ponders on whether it is all true or not, and if it is,



why she is unable to understand it or apply it to her own hectic Twentieth Century life.

Mother *knew* both sides of life, but she chose to write only about one side. She knew the stern realities, the immorality, and the seamy, disgusting sidelights of life. But why write about them? Every one has his own trouble and heartache, so why not give the world something happy to read, and make them see visions of idealised life? Surely this does more good than sordid tales of sex filth that only lead to morbid and diseased thinking. For myself, I am glad she allowed the stinking cesspools of life to remain dormant. I would not want a literary scavenger in the family. Mother's idea must have been right, for the few times she strayed from the path and tried other themes, her audiences were amazed and shocked. They did not like it!

How do I know these things? Because during the past twenty-five years I have read hundreds of letters from people in all stations of life, and from many different countries. The comments they make, and the different viewpoints they have, constitute material for much interesting study. They wrote to Mother in the utmost confidence that they would be accorded sympathetic understanding. She spent many hours of her valuable time answering these letters, but obviously, she could not answer all, as some days her mail was tremendous. When we urged her to rest or play during the little leisure time she had, she only smiled in her slow way, and said that these letters were from *her* people who loved her, that they believed in her, they expected an honest opinion and they must not be disappointed! Surely an undebatable reply! So she went on her way serenely, answering as many letters as she could, and more than she should



have. Many of them were not considered valueless and thrown into the waste basket after they were answered. In a little room just off Mother's study there is a case of drawers, and these drawers are filled with letters tied in packages, and each labelled—whom they are from and when they were answered. They meant much to her; they were her applause, and she thrived on it, just as an actor on the stage thrills at the applause from his audience.

And now that she is gone, the letters keep on coming. Trying to keep faith with her and do what she would like, we have answered each one; but obviously we cannot carry on long correspondence with each one. They all contain words of sympathy and comfort for her little family who are left behind and tell practically the same story—how much she helped them, and what joy they found in her simple, nature stories. For her ideas of life were not complex and involved. They were based on a few fundamental principles, and *Love*—love of God, love of nature, and love of her fellow men. She believed indeed that she was her "brother's keeper," and that if you kept the Commandment, "Love thy neighbour as thyself," you kept all the others. What of grief or suffering was sent to her she endured with a serene repose and calm dignity, with no outward show of emotion; always in a way that was a help and comfort to others, never faltering in her implicit belief in God's Plan, which some day we will understand. Now, we who are left in sorrow cannot do less. It is the memory of Mother's faith, her patience, and tremendous courage that will be my inspiration to keep trying when all things else fail.

Among Mother's most prized possessions are many gifts from appreciative folk. From the farthest tip of Africa came gorgeous, snowy aigrettes; from South



IN NOVEMBER, 1924  
*Six weeks before her tragic death*



America a wondrous shawl; from an English army officer, a charming bit of the coast of Scotland done in oils; from a prisoner a beautifully inlaid jewel box made in the prison workshops; from collectors all sorts of specimens; and there are bits of embroidery, rare old china and vases, bird boxes, Indian blankets and pottery, treasured old books and parchments, and many little pictures and poems, the work of childish brains and fingers.

Mother always gave particular care and attention to children, to the little things that might help in the development of their ability and talent, for she always felt that had her own mother been possessed of less vision, she might have received many serious blows and drawbacks to her ambitions. Despite the fact that her father and mother were busy people, with a large farm and twelve children to care for, they always took time to listen to and to encourage the "baby," and to write the ideas or bits of verse as she requested. She derived much pleasure and amusement from this.

At first all Mother's published work was natural history, but gradually she began to write fiction, and then she became more interested in people. She studied people wherever she was. If she went to a theatre, she loved to go early to watch the faces of the people as they came in: the way they walked; their expressions; how they were dressed; how they behaved toward the ushers; their comments on the music; and then she speculated on their occupations and dispositions. She did the same thing in railway stations, street cars, race tracks, picture shows, churches, boats, stores, ocean beaches, and in various social gatherings among her friends. She always listened to their conversations, not out of idle curiosity, but because she learned valuable things about human nature

that enabled her to interpret character faithfully and clearly. This is the reason I always say that Mother never wasted any time. Whether she was working or playing, or on a supposed vacation, she never missed anything, and some time, somewhere, she made use of what she saw and heard. Her mind worked constantly. Because of this study she knew life and people—their various interests, reactions and viewpoints, so that her book people come pretty close to home; they live and speak and move much as we do. They are human, and they appeal to humanity wherever it is found.

Only two days before Mother was taken from us we returned from a week among the famous redwoods, the giant sequoias of Santa Cruz and Muir Woods. In the grove of big trees at Santa Cruz she strayed away from us several times, and we could see her among the ferns and undergrowth, studying, admiring, and thinking. And in Muir Woods she followed a babbling little stream until she became completely lost from us, and after we had hunted for a while I heard her familiar, "Whoo—oo—oo," and then a very small voice from far away called, "Am I lost?" I am sure that, had she lived, we would have been given some beautiful writing as a result of her exploration, for she was thrilled by the grandeur and majesty of the aged redwoods.

She studied all nature with the same intense absorption. She had the most acute hearing I have ever known, and when she was afield, she heard sounds that the ordinary individual misses. She got her natural history from the great outdoors, not from books, and so her nature books have the same charm as her fiction. They ring true.

Another greatly developed quality which Mother had,



and one which was indispensable to her work, is her infinite and unlimited patience. After school was out in the spring, I used to go to the woods and fields with her every day. In those days which were passed in Indiana, we did not skim over the country in a car. We harnessed our faithful little horse to the "buggy" and went jogging slowly and dustily to our destinations, always several miles into the country. Sometimes we had macadam roads, but more often we had just "pikes," and if the country was low and through swamps, as it usually was, we had only "corduroys." In case you do not know what "corduroys" are, they are roads built by laying small logs across the road, about two feet apart, so that wheels could not sink too far in the mire. Needless to say, the constant jolting of a journey of several miles over such roads, leaves one tired and shaken. Arrived at the location, we climbed barbed-wire fences, waded streams and climbed trees, trudged over newly ploughed fields—anything or any place to reach a bird nest. Then, having located thirty or forty nests, we visited them every day, so that the birds became accustomed to us; gradually the camera was set up, focussed, covered with branches, and we retired to a vantage point from which we could see the old ones as they came to and from the nests, and later, as they fed the young ones. We trailed from forty to sixty feet of hose behind us, with a rubber bulb on the end, so that any time anything interesting happened, all we had to do was to squeeze the bulb and we had it. This was not easy work, and I have seen Mother tire out two strong men—for the pictures you see do not show the awful heat of a July day in Indiana, the wasps, mosquitoes, insects, snakes, thorns, or the swampy mire under foot.



So it was that Mother did not have to check up on her natural history facts as she gave them to the public. She wrote, from personal experience, what she saw and heard, and it did not require substantiation. She wasted no time looking to see if other authors agreed with her, or hunting references, or searching musty volumes for statistics. She did not have to, for she knew whereof she spoke. And it is the same with the novels. I can go through her books of fiction and pick out the characters, almost without exception—I know many of them personally. The people Mother put into her books, who lived before my time, I know about, too—where, when, and how they lived and who they were. I was brought up on stories about real people and knew Mother's childhood friends and playmates almost as well as I knew my own. So when people say Mother wrote "romantic stuff, too good to be true," they do not know whereof they speak: for Mother wrote real people into her fiction characters, and they speak and move and live in the books just as they did and do in real life.

Mother kept up with the times to a certain extent. She did not drink or smoke or gamble, and she did not allow me to do these things either. She loathed jazz music, but she was broader-minded than some of her generation. As a girl she was not permitted to dance or play cards, and she always resented it; so she allowed me to do both, and I also had her permission to bob my hair. She said she had always rolled her stockings, and she never wore a corset, so she was ahead of the styles in these things many years ago. She was a good fellow and seldom refused to go anywhere if she had the time; even if she was not particularly interested personally, there was always the thought uppermost in her mind that

she might get something out of it that she could use, so she went right along. She once went with us to Tia Juana to the horse races, but instead of staying with us in our box, she mingled with the crowds who were staking their money on the horses, and studied the faces of the people below the grand stand who were drinking and eagerly awaiting the turn of a wheel to see whether they lost or won. She noted carefully the Mexican band and its music, the soldiers and their uniforms; she made us drive her all about the quaint little town before we went to dinner, which she insisted should be in one of the cafés typical of the place. After dinner she went into the gambling dens where the play was most exciting and the painted women most disgusting, where they were drinking and selling dope—but she went only once, and then only for the experience, never to take any part in the revelry.

She went to Beverly Hills to the automobile races, attended theatres, picture shows, hotels, cafés, clubs and concerts, luncheons and parties, and considered it all a part of her education. It was thus that she learned both sides of life. In cities she went all the way from the slums and jails to the mayor's home.

Mother had boundless vitality, tremendous energy, and unlimited ambition; and the fortunate thing was that she had the ability and the capability to pass them on to others in such delightful form. I never knew any one who had so many plans—her brain worked constantly, planning things she wanted to do, sometimes for herself, but mostly for others. Now many plans are left unfulfilled. Some way, I can only think of her now as toiling on, striving as always to reach the highest and best for others as well as herself.

The many pleasures Mother might have had and did

not, the many plans she left unrealised, have taught me a lesson. Do not put off too long the things you want to do most. Take a little time to play, along with the work. When you do your best, you are entitled to some pleasure, you owe it to your family and friends—it takes so little time, and your work will be all the better off if you take a little rest now and then. We are not meant to be drudges, to get in a rut and never get out of it. Daily routine is a killing grind—grown-ups need a playtime just the same as children, for “men are only boys grown tall.” So take a vacation now and again, and make some of the dreams come true.

It is quite true that Mother had the imagination and propensity for telling a story and making it good that goes with the writer of fiction. But she was also very self-reliant and accustomed to looking after her own interests, even though she hated the details of business. I am reminded of an incident which happened a few months ago. My husband and I, with our small son, drove out to Mother’s “baby mountain” on the top of which her new home was being built. Out there we always found one Hans Rygaard, who was especially commissioned to guard the wild flowers and trees over the six acres while the construction was in progress. Rygaard came over to look at Jimmy, and as we were leaving he remarked to my husband: “Well, take good care of him, but don’t bother about her,” indicating me with a brief nod of his head.

“But,” I protested, “why tell him not to bother about me?”

Rygaard was a trifle embarrassed for a second, but he stuck to his point, and, slowly scratching his head, he

drawled: "Because, if you're anything like your mother, you can take care of yourself!"

Mother had always lived in Indiana until eight years ago, when she left her old haunts and came to California. She felt that she had exhausted her resources in Indiana, that she needed new faces, new material, and new ideas to improve her work, so she sought "new worlds to conquer." She bought a home in Los Angeles, perilously near to the "wicked" city of Hollywood! But she found Hollywood a very delightful, restful spot, and made many friends there. On coming West, she spent much study familiarising herself with the bird and plant life of California, as they are very different from the Middle West. Her list of achievements already included editing camera departments for magazines, short stories, editorials, songs, books of natural history, fiction, and poetry, several of which she illustrated with her own photographs, always designing and sketching the covers for her books, as well as the front matter. To this list she now added moving pictures. She wanted her pictures to be like her books—simple, wholesome pictures of the great mass of common people who are the backbone of our nation; the class to which she belonged and for which she wrote and toiled until the end, just as I will.

As my narrative nears its end, I should like to say a word about my father. After Dad found out what Mother was trying to do, he was unceasing in his desire and efforts to help her. At first, when she was doing much photographic work, she was very particular about the print paper and chemicals she used for developing. Although Dad was president and cashier of the Bank of

Geneva, he always found time to go over to his drug store and send special orders for supplies. When the long hours at the bank were over, he went to the drug store and weighed, measured, and mixed the chemicals, for Dad was always extremely methodical and painstaking with everything he did, so that Mother knew that her compounds were perfect. As Mother insisted upon paying for everything herself, Dad ordered her supplies and materials, including cameras and lenses, through his store at wholesale prices, and that saved her considerable money.

He told his customers at the bank what Mother was doing, and asked them to let him know if they found bird nests containing eggs or young, so that she might photograph them. Some of the rarest and most unusual pictures she ever took were the result of news carried to her by the patrons of the store and bank. The family on the farm and the man who pumped the oil wells were likewise informed, and by and by the whole community knew and kept watch. Even the kiddies ran to her with wounded birds to be doctored, and butterfly and moth cocoons to be hatched.

When one of us could not go afield with Mother, Dad hired a man to accompany her, partly for protection and partly to help carry cameras and other paraphernalia, as Mother's complete equipment often weighed more than a hundred pounds. Mother refused to use films; she used 8 x 10 plates, never carrying less than two or three dozen, so they added greatly to the weight of the outfit.

It was Dad who always provided a safe horse for Mother to drive, because sometimes when she was alone and tired from a long, hot day afield, she fell asleep, and



the horse always brought her safely home. When Dad could go with her, nothing was too much for him to do, although he was never very strong. He rowed the boat for miles on warm, sticky days; waded creeks and jumped ditches; tore down and replaced fences; climbed trees and crawled into hollow logs; carried lunches and cold drinks over ploughed fields and through the ooze and muck of mosquito-infested swamps—always patiently and willingly.

When Mother began writing fiction the camera work was not so strenuous. The best-educated man in town taught school during the day and worked in Dad's drug store evenings. Mother liked to discuss her stories and grammatical construction with him; for this reason Dad would go to the store after banking hours and do this man's work, so that he could work with Mother for a few hours.

Then came the books, and Mother was busier than ever, so Dad arranged for us to take our meals at the one hotel the village afforded, in order that there would be less housework for Mother. This we did for several years, and although the meals were often poorly cooked and poorly seasoned, Dad never complained.

Dad did not mind when the house was filled with crippled birds, moths, and butterflies; and if a moth laid eggs on the seat of his favourite chair, he just sat somewhere else until they hatched, and then he helped gather the nice little woolly caterpillars into a box and fed them until they spun cocoons.

In fact, Dad was often "the power behind the throne," making possible things that Mother never would have accomplished alone—always watching for a chance to make things easier for her. He had unfailing faith and pride



in her and in her work, and I will never forget the elated tone of his voice when he introduced "my wife" to his friends, and then slipped off in a secluded corner and told them all about her work, for he knew Mother was easily embarrassed and that she did not like having her achievements discussed in her presence.

Dad and I were always pals—we kept each other from becoming lonely while Mother was occupied with her work. When I was too young to be of any help to her, Dad always waited for me at noon, and we had our lunch together; then I stayed with him until school time. After school in the afternoon I went directly to the bank, and we went home when Dad's work was finished; mostly we worked among the flowers and played with my numerous pets until dinner time. Dinner over, I usually seemed to need help with my arithmetic, and Mother always hated figures, so Dad came to my rescue. All the vacation Dad had for years was our usual Sunday picnic. We spent Sundays wherever Mother had the most bird nests located, usually somewhere along the Wabash River, as Dad bought a boat for her convenience. Sometimes they fished all day, and I roamed the woods with my dog and gun, although I never had the heart to shoot at anything but a target.

When Mother had exhausted all the resources for her work around Geneva, and we went to Rome City to live, Dad gave up part of his work in the bank and drug store, sold his farm, and spent three or four days each week with her. It was a dirty, unpleasant trip back and forth, but Dad never objected, and each week came laden with fresh fruits, vegetables, or some special treat for Mother.

Several years passed in this way, and then Mother

came to Los Angeles. Being twenty years older than Mother, it was difficult for Dad to give up his home, friends, and garden and make himself happy and contented in a strange land, among strange faces. But Dad accepted the change, adapted himself as best he could, and divided his time between Indiana and California. He made the long journey many times, as he was devoted to an only brother in Indiana and to us. By this time I was also in Los Angeles with the children, and he adored them.

Dad was just getting ready to come to us for Christmas, when the news of Mother's tragic death reached him. He was never the same after the shock of her passing. The dry humour, the twinkle in his eyes, and the funny little smile that wrinkled the corners of his mouth seemed to go away—and they never came back. He lost his old-time "pep" and enthusiasm and became very quiet, spending much time alone among his loved flowers or before his fireplace with books and papers.

Then one day in early December, almost exactly two years after Mother's accident, he was preparing to come to us for Christmas when he suddenly lost his appetite and became very weak. I went immediately to the home of his beloved brother, and there I found him curled up in bed like a tired child, with the covers pulled up under his chin. No pain—no distress—apparently comfortable and wanting nothing but to be let alone—and so he slept away. Seventy-six years of life—lived sincerely and unostentatiously—a memory one never forgets.

Like a story, a picture, to be successful, must have an underlying theme. Just a lot of incidents strung together will not make a picture, and without a definite

purpose for its creation, your picture is lost: it must teach something; it must mean something; it must give you something to think about. If you see a picture and think about it on the way to your work, or as you tuck the baby in bed, then that picture is a success. It does not require a tremendous spectacle to make a successful picture. The simplest things are often the most dramatic, and, after all, the greatest thing in any picture is the thing you cannot *see*; it is the thing the picture makes you *feel* that proves whether or not it had a purpose and determines its success or failure.

Mother had one idea to which she always clung: be sure you are right and then go ahead. She did not live to see her belief in her pictures realised; but my husband and I, who are carrying on her ideas and making her books into the kind of pictures she wanted, are seeing daily that she was right. And the success and popularity they have reached would have delighted her beyond words; they would have justified her faith in picture audiences, just as the success of her books justified her faith in the reading public. She only laughed when producers argued that sex pictures were what the public demanded, and answered: "Just *try* them on something different. I still believe the greatest percentage of our people are loyal Americans, and that they will uphold the ideals and traditions of their forefathers."

Now we have the success of *A Girl of the Limberlost*, *The Keeper of the Bees*, *Laddie*, and *The Magic Garden* to prove she was right. We have several more books to make into pictures, and, God willing, we will make them into the same kind of clean, wholesome pictures as the others: then if they do you no good, at least they will do you no harm.

One of Mother's favourite pastimes was fishing. She had a foxy tackle box filled with all sorts of fresh and salt water baits, reels, and lines, and no one touched them but herself. She always took splendid care of her things, and she carefully washed and dried her lines, and polished her reels after every expedition. She caught and photographed many sea fish; another of her plans was an intimate little fishing story, illustrated with her own photographs, material for which was about half gathered.

Mother spent much time along the beaches, and occasionally the ocean was a source of great inspiration to her. One day in the summer of 1924 she had a letter from a famous musician who was setting one of her little poems to music. He wrote in some distress, saying that he had struck a particularly attractive rhythm, but to complete it properly he must have four stanzas, and there were only three. Could she possibly supply one more? Mother thought it over. After dinner that night she took a few sheets of paper and a pencil, called her driver, and away they went. By ten o'clock they were back, and as she passed through the room where we were sitting, in answer to my look of inquiry, she said: "Yes—I got the best one of the lot!" John had driven her to the end of the road along the ocean front; there she left the car and walked up a long way and sat down on the sand. There, watching the eternal waves roll in and the moonlight dancing on the water, she had gotten her inspiration.

For many years Mother kept a tablet and pencil tied to the bedpost, so that, if something "came to her" in the middle of the night, she could write it before it escaped her. She oftentimes wrote during the night, because, if she awakened with ideas, they must be written at once

—if she waited until morning they might be gone. *Jesus of the Emerald* was written in that way.

A few days ago, in looking through one of Mother's books of California wild flowers, I found this notation on the last page: "Two hundred and forty-nine in book—I have one hundred and fifty-six; leaves me ninety-three to locate and plant." She refers to the six acres in Bel-Air, West Los Angeles, where her "dream house on the hill" now stands. It is characteristic of Mother that the first thing accomplished on the hill was an elaborate sprinkler system, installed before anything else was begun, so that her beloved flowers and birds might have a drink. And now the hill shows the effect of the water, for the vegetation is green and abundant, and there are flowers everywhere. And despite the arguments of the architects and landscape gardeners, who want to tear the wild things from the baby mountain and terrace it formally and plant it with cultivated stuff not nearly so artistic or beautiful as it is now, the wild things shall remain just as she wished—the flowers shall have their drinks regularly, and the birds may nest without fear of disturbance. And it is a peculiar fact that birds learn very quickly where they may build in safety. They know when food and water is put out for them, and they collect rapidly. Already I can see and hear more birds on Mother's hill than anywhere else around it.

Mother was more or less self-sufficient, and given plenty of books and open spaces through which to roam, she could be content for a long time. Cities had little lure for her, and she preferred to live in or near the country most of her life. Her employees adored her and were always eager to do all in their power to please her, even to working overtime without grumbling. She always pro-



vided light, airy, comfortable living quarters for them and gave them plenty of time to devote to their own interests. She had a way with her helpers peculiar to herself—a way that impelled the laundry man and the milk man and the delivery boys to knock at the door and timidly inquire if they “might please see Mrs. Porter for the last time,” and to brush away a tear as they came tiptoeing from her study, where we placed her among her loved books and personal treasures for her last hours with us; a way that made the darky boys on a coal truck stop and take off their hats as the cortège passed; and a way that made my cook’s little boy beg with tears in his eyes to see her again, “because she was the only real lady” who ever shook his hand. Mother is gone, but the valiant spirit, the beautiful soul of her must be marching on, doing all the “little big things” that endeared her to thousands of all kinds and classes. Perhaps, if she could speak now, she might say to us the lines she wrote for me in my copy of *Music of the Wild*:

Come with me, and you shall know  
The garden where God’s flowers grow.  
Come with me, and you shall hear  
His waters whisper songs of cheer.

And if you lift your eyes on high  
To see the larks fly in the sky,  
Let them rove on to the Heavens above  
And meet the miracle of God’s love.



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